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COUNTRIES

EDITED BY  
PERCIVAL WILDE



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## PREFACE

THERE have been many collections of one-act plays. The present volume, differs from its predecessors in several notable respects.

The proportion of important new material is unprecedentedly high: seven of the twelve titles have never before been published in England.

The calibre of the contributors is noteworthy: they include outstanding writers of the respective countries who have had recognition in countries other than their own. They represent new talent in the persons of Clifford Odets and Philip Johnson, both unknown at comparatively recent dates, both solidly established almost overnight on the strength of works of outstanding merit.

The collection is cosmopolitan to a degree hitherto unapproached in a volume of comparable size: nine countries find places in it, and an effort, moreover, has been made to assign space in proportion to the relative importance of each in the field. The British Isles, for example, are represented by four works, and might well claim a larger quota.

The collection is contemporary: the majority of the plays in it are less than five years old. As a whole they may be said to picture the thought, the themes, and the technique of the present. Two or three important writers who have recently been inactive are necessarily unrepresented.

The plays are wholly unexpurgated. The book is not designed for school use, nor, indeed, for use in any universities save the most liberal. It is dedicated to a more numerous and more important body—the adult reading public. While organizations producing the plays will doubtless omit lines which might offend local audiences, it is the

editor's conviction that a play which has literary distinction has the right to be placed in the hands of a mature reader without first undergoing a process of emasculation.

The foreign-language plays have been adapted by the editor. There has been, and probably will always be, much discussion of what constitutes the most satisfactory English rendering of a foreign work. Literal translations, approved of by teachers, are, in the editor's opinion, unfair to the originals. The faithful substitution of the dictionary word for the foreign one produces a certain specious verbal literality at the expense of cadence, fluidity, and general stylistic character. Like a musician, an author must have an ear. His writings cannot be dealt with literally without fatal injury. A free adaptation, although apparently no translation at all, reads better, acts better, and presents the author in his true stature, and not as a foreigner trying to express himself in a language which he writes grammatically but without ease or distinction. Fundamentally it is the thought which is important: it must be the goal of the adaptor to present it in the manner and the words which the author would have chosen had he been perfectly conversant with English. It is in that spirit that the editor has laboured.

The present volume, finally, differs from all its predecessors because it is the first that has actually been edited by a professional playwright, whose point of view, inevitably, is neither that of the critic nor that of the professor. The critic naturally favours works which conform to the set standards of the audience whose tastes he may be said to represent. The pedagogue chooses works whose educational values meet the needs of the institutional groups he has in mind. The playwright is concerned with the play as a play, and is influenced more (he likes to think) by the merits of the work in itself than by the unpredictable reactions of any particular body of readers or spectators.

Excellent anthologies have resulted from the application of the first two methods; the editor can only hope that the

present volume, compiled in accordance with other principles, may bear comparison with them.

For assistance in gathering material the editor is indebted to Mr J. W. Marriot, of London, Herr Heinrich B. Kranz, of Vienna, and to other European friends. For help in collating his preliminary literal versions (which served as the foundations of his adaptations) with the originals he is greatly indebted to Mrs Egbert Hal Bogardus, whose accurate linguistic knowledge was placed at his service without compensation of any kind, solely because of her interest in the work. He is grateful to Dr James Thayer Gerould, who placed at his disposal the resources of the Princeton University Library. He is under obligation too to his publishers, whose co-operation and assistance have been unfailing, and who, except for requesting that he include a play of his own, have given him a free hand in the selection of material.

P. W.

LONDON

*September 1936*



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## *The United States*

### PAUL GREEN: "HYMN TO THE RISING SUN"

THEY are a familiar sight throughout the Southern states, the chain gangs. While the cultured people of the South disapprove of them, realizing that the whole system has been foisted upon them by politicians, it is impossible to penetrate far into a Southern state without encountering gangs of men, among whom the blacks predominate, conspicuous in convict stripes, hard at work under the eyes of guards whose shotguns are ready in the crooks of their elbows. The men step aside as the traveller passes, and the guards survey him with an interest which becomes personal if he hesitates; for these men are criminals, and a sovereign state is compelling them, in a most literal manner, to work out their punishments.

It is the way of the South with a problem peculiar to the South. It is part of a vicious circle whose every link is vicious: poverty, ignorance, brutality, crime, brutality, more poverty.

The Southern states are poor. Education is costly. At the best school attendance is compulsory during only six months of the year, and then only until the age of fourteen. At the worst school attendance is not required at all; 10 per cent. of the whole population is illiterate, while the Negro rate doubles, and in many districts triples, that high figure.

Ignorance breeds crime, the more brutal kinds of crime; yet the same poverty which makes education a privilege and not a prerogative prevents dealing with it in a modern, scientific manner. Prisons are dear; chain gangs are cheap and are profitable to the state. In the mild Southern climate

prisoners may live and work in the open with only the most rudimentary shelter. By the device of farming them out to private employers, or using them on projects which would otherwise call for paid labourers, they may be made good investments until it is time to turn them loose.

It is a system under which brutality is held in check by even greater brutality. The rehabilitation of the offender has no place in its programme. It is concerned only with extracting from each body a maximum of marketable labour. If it converts young delinquents into brutes, and hardens mature criminals who are already brutes, this is merely incidental. The books show a profit, and that is the sole consideration.

When sentences end graduates of the chain gang are returned to society for periods which are usually brief. They are not likely to become useful. Whatever their initial maladjustments, they have been made permanent. The ex-convicts commit new crimes, and return to the chain gang; and since the losses for which they are responsible cannot be conveniently estimated in terms of dollars the books continue to show a profit. The vicious circle continues.

"And if no 'criminals' are found," writes Walter Wilson, author of *Forced Labor in the United States*, "the sheriff sends out an undercover man to engage a group of Negroes in a crap game. Then the game is raided. The mill of criminal justice grinds most industriously when men are needed for a big road-making job." In other words, the system, kept going because it is a manner of dealing with a problem, tends to draw more and more individuals into itself.

It is the chain gang which is the subject of Paul Green's play—"The chain gang, the nine-pound hammer, the wheelbarrow, the shovel, the twenty-nine lashes, the seventy-two lashes, the sweatbox, the steel cage, the rifle, and the shotgun. When the judge sentenced you here he said hard labour, and that's what I aim to make it."



GREEN: "HYMN TO THE RISING SUN"

Paul Green is a Southerner. He was born at Lillington, North Carolina, in the heart of a cotton district, forty-two years ago. He has spent nearly all of that time in the South. He has dealt with the life surrounding him, with which he is intimately familiar, in a long series of notable works. The isolated populations inhabiting the peninsulas which reach out into Albemarle Sound, the gone-to-seed descendants of the aristocracy of a hundred years ago, the 'poor white' whose sole remaining pride is that he is not black, have supplied him with a diversity of themes; but the poetry and the tragedy of the Negro have been the subjects of his most important writings and of his Pulitzer Prize play, *In Abraham's Bosom*.

In *Hymn to the Rising Sun* Green writes with complete sincerity and devastating frankness. The work is openly propagandist: he wishes it read, or, better, witnessed, by Southern legislators. But, although propaganda, the play is too artistically conceived either to preach a moral or to resort to the antiquated device of bringing down retribution upon the representative of authority, who, as he himself points out, is as much a victim of the chain-gang system as are the convicts.

Far more effectively, the play is a slice of life, appalling, terrible, and utterly convincing. There is no moral. "This is the chain gang." "The Boy" is soft. The Captain proposes to harden him. He makes an excellent beginning, and will doubtless succeed. "The Runt" is punished. It leads to his death. Does the Captain's conscience trouble him? Not in the least. "I'll bury him where I damn please," he remarks, and goes off chanting "Hep-hep" as the convicts march to their toil. It is the Fourth of July, and Independence Day has started as it ought—with a rousing speech and the singing of *America*. The members of the legislatures which approve of chain gangs are doubtless making rousing speeches themselves, and are listening to the singing of the same anthem. To them, as to the Captain, the affair of "Runt" and "The Boy"—and

"Careless Love" and "Pearly Gates"—is of no consequence.

The language of the play is remarkable. Making use of every expression which the age of repression kept out of print, it rises, notably in the Captain's speeches, to heights of poetic eloquence. Like the play itself, it is appalling—and emotionally moving. Its irony, conscious or unconscious, is without limit. It is a perfect vehicle for the thought it expresses. It will doubtless shock many readers, but if the chain-gang system itself has not shocked them something more is needed to galvanize them into states of useful consciousness. It is phonographically correct: that is its justification.

The squeamish may object to the reason assigned for "Runt's" punishment. They should not. It is most logical, and the subject itself is dealt with in the most matter-of-fact way in all modern works on penology. A letter from the author dealing with the point is so interesting that it may be quoted in its entirety:

I agree that the chain gang is the matter of concern in *Hymn to the Rising Sun*, and not any sort of sex vagary. But, precisely because that is true, I think it would be a mistake to have "Runt's" punishment come as a result of some minor infraction of rules. For then the darker, more disastrous nature of convict life would be but once again illustrated by a pathetic and not tragic incident—and tragedy is what I am after in the piece, since the lives I am telling about are tragic. Suppose the Negro were put into the sweatbox because he had been caught smoking in his bunk, or talking back to one of the guards. Then the dramatic result would be to point the finger of accusation at the system the while it put an arm of sympathy around the abused individual. But this would be the old sheep-and-goat method now a little dear to our younger radical writers, and not true to the infinite complexity and shades of difference of human nature. Again, the "Runt" is what he is because the system is what it is, and the system obtains as it does because of such fellows as "Runt." But—and here the higher reality comes in—the observer (you,

PAUL GREEN: "HYMN TO THE RISING SUN"

others, myself) stands outside the vicious circle and sees that we must go back, far, far back, to start growing a different and happier society. And that is true, isn't it? And, after all, what better criterion than truth? •

*Hymn to the Rising Sun* is the truth—struck out with the nine-pound hammer. •



*The United States*

HYMN TO THE RISING SUN

A PLAY

By PAUL GREEN

## CHARACTERS

THE CAPTAIN, *a convict boss*  
TWO GUARDS  
BRIGHT BOY  
PEARLY GATES  
HOPPY  
CARELESS LOVE  
THE RUNT  
OTHER CONVICTS

} *convicts*

TIME: *The present*

PLACE: *Somewhere in the United States*

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## HYMN TO THE RISING SUN

*The rising curtain discloses a convict stockade. It is the hour before sunrise, and in the grey twilight of the upheaving dawn a tent with the lips of its opening snarled back stands silhouetted against the paling stars. A line of posts like Indian palisades passes behind the tent, and stretched across them are the faint horizontal streaks of close-barbed wire. At the left front is a barrel, and beside it a rough bare table, and at the right front a box structure much like a small privy, some four feet high and about two feet wide. A smoky tin lantern set on top of the box casts its bilious eye over the scene and into the mouth of the tent, where the convicts are sleeping in their double bunks.*

*For a moment nothing is heard except the deep breathing of the sleepers and the occasional clink of a chain as some convict moves his weary body on a hard shuck mattress. And then, far away from the other side of the round world, comes the snug crow of a rooster in salute to the waking day. A huge half-naked, middle-aged Negro lying in the bottom bunk at the left smacks his lips and mutters in his sleep.*

NEGRO [*the sound growling up from the deep cavern of his belly*]. Ah-oom.

*[His long arms slide off the bunk and hang limply down to the ground. The top bunk at the right creaks, a chain rattles, and a boy about seventeen years old, with shaved head, haggard face, and hollow eyes, props himself up on his elbow and looks over at the Negro. He also is naked from the waist up.*

BOY [*calling in a low husky whisper*]. Pearly Gates. [*But there is no answer from the Negro. He calls again—softly, and with a careful look about him.*] Pearly Gates.

*[The Negro stirs fitfully, pulls his long arms back up*

across his body, and with a deep sigh goes on sleeping.

A CONVICT'S VOICE [*from the depths of the tent, angry and guttural*]. Pipe down.

[*The boy waits a moment, and then turns and stares at the box. A long while he gazes at it as if listening, and then with a sort of moan stretches himself out on his mattress. For a while everything is quiet—no rattling of chains, no clank of iron on iron, cuff on cuff, no muttering is heard. A deep and dreamless sleep once more seems to pervade the scene. But the sickly, rheumy eye of the lantern does not sleep. Steadily it watches, waits and watches, while the night gnats and bugs whirl dizzily around it. Now it begins to wink, for the box on which it sits has started shaking. Something is imprisoned there. A scurried drumming is heard inside as if a huge bird were beating at the plank walls with bony featherless wings. The boy at the right front raises himself up in his bunk again and stares out at the box, then looks over at the Negro at the left.*]

BOY [*in an agonizing whisper*]. Pearly Gates, Pearly Gates!

[*The Negro at the left shakes himself like a huge chained animal, sticks his great ape hands up and grasps the side rails of the bunk above him.*]

PEARLY GATES [*muttering*]. Ah-oom.

[*His hands release the rails and drop to the ground with a thud. The drumming in the box grows louder, and a voice inside is heard calling piteously.*]

VOICE [*as if embedded in a thick quilt*]. Water—water!

BOY [*now sitting bolt upright and wagging his head in anguish*]. Somebody do something! Oh, do!

[*A tremulous shaking of iron chains passes through the tent, and the convicts turn in their bunks.*]

ANOTHER CONVICT'S VOICE [*from the depths of the tent*]. Go to sleep!



HYMN TO THE RISING SUN

BOY [*calling softly again*]. Pearly Gates.

CONVICT'S VOICE [*in savage mockery*]. Pearly Gates—  
Pearly Gates! What can he do?

[*One of the great hands of the Negro at the left begins  
• waving in the air round his face as if shooing off  
pestering mosquitoes or flies.*]

PEARLY GATES [*groaning and smacking his lips in his sleep*].  
Lemme 'lone, lemme 'lone, I say.

VOICE [*in the box*]. Water, water!

BOY [*moaning*]. Pearly Gates.

[*In the bunk below the boy a dropsical, brutal-faced  
white man of fifty-five turns wrathfully over.*]

• WHITE MAN. Shet your face, Bright Boy, shet it! [*Muttering*] A man's got to get his sleep, ain't he, if he swings them picks? What with you and the bugs and the heat—  
[*He suddenly lunges upward, shoots his hand out around the side of the boy's bunk and grabs him fiercely in the side. The boy lies out a low wail and pulls loose from him. The white man lies down again.*] Next time I get hold of you I'll tear out a whole handful of your guts. [*The boy bends his head on his knees and begins to weep silently. Presently he chokes down his sobs, wipes his eyes with the palm of his hands, and sits staring before him. For an instant everything is silent once more, and then the drumming in the box begins again. The boy moans, and the white man ierks up his leg to kick at the mattress above him, but a groan bursts from his lips as the shackle bites down on his ankle.*] Great God A'mighty—I've ruint my leg! [*He bends far over and rubs his leg, and then snarls around at the box*] Stop it, Runt! Stop it!

[*He turns his face away from the lantern light and stretches himself out for a nap. Pearly Gates suddenly sits up in his bunk. He wiggles his fingers in the air, waking them to life, and opens his mouth in great gapes.*]

PEARLY GATES [*scratching his close-cropped head and staring about him*]. Who that called my name?

BOY. Runt's dying in that box. Oh, he is! Get the Cap'n, I tell you.

PAUL GREEN

PEARLY GATES [*thinking awhile and then showing his white teeth in a grin*]. How I gonna git the Cap'n and me chained to this here bunk?

BOY. Call him.

PEARLY GATES. Nunh-unh.

WHITE MAN [*turning over on his back and chuckling*]. Reckon when Runt gets out of that box he'll quit going behind the tent to love hisself. [*Pearly Gates begins to laugh softly*]. What's tickling you?

PEARLY GATES. Bull of the woods, he said he was. Ah-oom—a hundred pounds of skin and bones.

RUNT [*in the box*]. Help me! Help me!

BOY [*vehemently*]. You got to do——

*[His voice stops dead in the air as the first guard comes in from the left. He is a dissolute-looking fellow about thirty years old, dressed in overalls, a wide, field straw hat, and a homespun shirt. He carries a double-barrelled shotgun in the crook of his arm. Everybody grows silent, and Pearly Gates lies down again in his bunk.]*

GUARD [*quietly*]. Cut out the talking. [*Looking over at the boy*] Lie down, sonny. [*He starts to go out at the left rear*].

BOY. Please, sir, please, sir——

GUARD [*stopping*]. What do you want?

BOY [*trying to control the trembling in his voice*]. It's the Runt—water—give him a drink.

GUARD [*sauntering back and stopping in front of the tent*]. So Bright Boy don't like the way we treat the Runt, huh?

BOY. Give him some air. [*Raging out*] No, I don't like it! Nobody likes it.

GUARD [*peering at the boy*]. Maybe you forgot what the Cap'n told you yesterday.

BOY. But he's smothering to death, I tell you.

GUARD. It's Runt in old Aggie's belly, not you.

BOY [*half hysterically*]. And you're killing him—killing——

PEARLY GATES [*interposing warningly*]. Heah, heah, boy.

## HYMN TO THE RISING SUN

GUARD. So you think this is a Sunday School, huh? [*Suddenly roaring at him*] Stop that whimpering! [*Then, quietly*] The Cap'n said keep your tongue to-yourself, didn't he? Ah-hah, seems like we can't please you, son. But we'll learn to please you.

[*He turns and saunters on out at the left rear. The boy flings himself back on his mattress and stuffs an old ragged blanket over his ears to keep out the low sound of Runt's whimpering in the box.*]

PEARLY GATES [*looking out and whispering*]. Jesus, child, you gonna git hurt if you don't mind. Heah me?

WHITE MAN [*whispering likewise up towards the mattress*]. It's hard at first, Bright Boy. But don't you worry. You'll forget your mammy's apron and Sunday School and all. Yeh, after while you will. [*Now once more from that other world far away comes the proud crowing of the rooster. The white man mutters to himself.*] Wisht that chicken had a ball and chain on him! Oh, God, I do!

[*He turns over again and hides his face under his arm.*]

PEARLY GATES [*singing in a whisper to himself*].

Good morning, Mr Rooster,  
I wisht I had your wing,  
I'd fly across the ocean—

[*He stops as an alarm clock goes off somewhere at the left, its little sharp daggers of sound stabbing the quiet morning air. The convicts lie still a moment, and then twist and mutter in their bunks, and the rattle and clink of chains accompany them. A moment passes, and the cook enters from the left front, carrying a steaming tin tub in his hands which he sets on the table. He is an elderly, bent white fellow, with a sad monkeylike face. His close-shaven head gives him a strange youthful appearance which contrasts sharply with the gnarled eldishness of his mouth and jaw. As the tub thumps down on the table the prisoner in the*

box at the right front drums and thunders with a last despairing burst of energy. The lantern reels crazily and falls to the ground, filling the scene with plunging grotesque shadows. A flood of clinking sounds rises from the tent, and the muffled faces and shoulders of the convicts can be seen as they rear up in their bunks to look out. With the slow waddling movement of an old duck the cook goes over, picks up the lantern, and replaces it on top of the box. Then he turns and pokes his way out at the left front, mopping his sweaty face with his apron as he goes. The convicts lay themselves down again to their rest. By this time the slaty grey of the approaching dawn has changed to a pearly grey, and the outlines of the bunks in the tent, fifteen or twenty of them, show up somewhat more distinctly, as do the posts and barbed wire across the rear. The convict boss comes walking slowly in from the right front. In the morning gloom he shows to be a heavy-set man dressed in a sombrero, khaki shirt, bow tie, and khaki trousers. Jammed down in one of his heavy boots is the snake-like form of Old Jeff, as the convict lash is called. In a holster at his waist he carries a forty-five automatic. Stopping by the box a moment, he listens, and then raps on it with his knuckles.

THE CAPTAIN [*in a husky, pleasant voice*]. How is it, old Love Powder?

RUNT'S VOICE [*faint and far away*]. Water, water!

CAPTAIN. Sure you're going to get your water—your piece of bread too—at feeding time. [*He walks on towards the mouth of the tent and speaks cheerily as he enters:*] Morning, boys, morning. [*Without waiting for a reply he continues:*] Hope you all slept well. [*Pulling a key from his pocket, he begins unlocking the shackles with a cool deft sound.*] I've let you sleep late to-day—half an hour extra. Now, ain't that nice? I say, ain't that nice?

## HYMN TO THE RISING SUN

SEVERAL SCATTERED VOICES. Yessir, Cap'n, yessir.

CAPTAIN. In honour of the occasion, I did. Now, get a move on. [*As each prisoner is unlocked he slips his shoes on, steps out into the aisle, and stands with his face to the front, waiting. The Captain goes on talking pleasantly:*] I've been up an hour. Already had my breakfast. [*Click, click.*] Yessir, couldn't sleep. •Responsibility, worry, thinking about you fellows—how to handle you, how to keep you happy. [*Chuckling*] Happy, you heard me. I'm the one that really wears the ball and chain in this camp. [*His voice dropping down into a sudden hard note and then rising to a pleasant pitch again*] Ha-ha, that's right. [*Passing along the tier of bunks to the left he continues unlocking the shackles. Click, click.*] I hope Runt's cutting up in that box didn't hinder your beauty sleep. [*He is now unlocking the shackles of Pearly Gates.*] I say, did it keep you awake?

PEARLY GATES [*showing his teeth in a sudden spasmodic grimace which is meant for a grin*]. No, sir; no, sir.

[*The Captain steps back two or three paces towards the front, and draws himself up in a military pose.*]

THE CAPTAIN [*his voice barking through the morning air*]. Hep—hep! [*The line of white convicts on the right march out and stand facing towards the left. There are ten of them—two elderly men, three middle-aged men, and five boys from seventeen to nineteen years of age. They are all naked to the waist, wearing dirty striped trousers and carrying their jackets and convict caps in their hands. The Negroes, led by Pearly Gates, come out and join the end of the line. There are eight of these: four young bucks, an old bent mulatto, and three middle-aged fellows. The Captain counts them.*] Two-four-six-eight-ten-twelve-fourteen-sixteen-eighteen—[*adding, with a gesture towards the box behind him*] nineteen. All right, get over there and purty up your faces. [*They move over to the barrel at the left and begin washing themselves in turn. As each one steps up to the barrel he sticks his jacket and cap between his knees, lifts out a cupped handful of water, dashes it on his face, and moves on, drying himself with his jacket. The cook brings in a dishpan from the left, sets it on the*

*table by the tub, and returns the way he came. The convicts put on their caps and jackets and begin forming in a line before the table, the ten whites in the same order as before and the Negroes behind them. The Captain pulls out a heavy gold watch, looks at it, snaps the lid to, and sends a brazen shout towards the rear.] Guard Number One!*

VOICE [*answering from the right rear*]. Y<sup>ay</sup>•hoo!

CAPTAIN. Guard Number Two!

A VOICE [*from the left rear*]. Yo-ho!

CAPTAIN. Four o'clock!

*[The cook comes rolling a wheelbarrow in from the left. It is loaded with tin pans and spoons. He stops it by the table, steps behind the tin tub, and picks up a dipper.]*

COOK [*croaking out to the tune of the army mess-call*]. Greasy, greasy, greasy! Greasy, greasy, greasy!

*[The convicts shuffle towards the wheelbarrow, and the white man who is in the lead picks up a plate with a spoon and holds it out for his helping. The cook loads him down with a dipperful of cabbage, fat-back, grits, and a hunk of bread. He passes on, goes over to the right rear, squats down on his haunches, and begins eating ravenously. The second man follows with his helping, takes his place by the first, and so on in turn, until all have ringed themselves across the scene in a squatting semi-circle, showing in the half-light like a row of grotesque animals. Some of them eat with the rapacity of dogs, their pewter spoons going scrape, scrape against the bottoms of their tin plates; others eat slowly and with no interest in their food. The middle-aged and elderly ones seem to have the best appetites. The younger ones eat little, and Bright Boy nothing at all. While the convicts are busy getting their food and settling down the Captain stands watching them indulgently like a circus-master with his trained pets. Now he moves over*

## HYMN TO THE RISING SUN

*to the right front and leans against the box. As he faces us we get a better view of him in the lantern's glow. His face is swarthy, heavy-jowled, clean-shaven, and set off with a close-cropped grey moustache. When he is in an easygoing mood, as he seems to be now, the pupils of his slumbrous brown eyes are cut across by the drooping curtain of two heavy eyelids. But when he gets mean these same eyelids have a way of snapping back like the hinged flap of a box, and the gleaming forked light from his eyes looks holes through a man.*

CAPTAIN [*scanning the row of figures and listening to the scrape, scrape of the pewter spoons*]. Go to it, boys, I like to hear you eat. And you need it. [*Looking off by the tent towards the horizon where the red of approaching sunrise is beginning to dye the sky*] It's going to be a fine day. Clear as a bell. And hot—clear and hot. We ought to move many a yard of dirt on that fill, hadn't we? I say, hadn't we?

SEVERAL SCATTERED VOICES. Yes, sir, Cap'n.

PEARLY GATES. Yea, Lord, let the buggies roll!

CAPTAIN. That's right, Pearly, old wheel-horse.

PEARLY GATES. Just watch me wheel, Cap'n.

CAPTAIN [*tapping on the box and addressing the prisoner within*]. And if you'll be a nice boy, Runt, we might give you your shovel back.

*[The boy, who is squatted over his untouched food, looks joyously up.]*

BOY [*with his voice half breaking in a fervent sob*]. Thank God!

CAPTAIN [*his glance drifting lazily over towards the boy*]. Son, you hurt my feelings. You oughta thank me—not God. [*His gaze coming back to the box*] And besides, Runt, we might need this bedroom of yours—who knows? [*The scraping of the spoons suddenly stops. The Captain laughs.*] Oh, I'm joking, boys, unless— [*His voice dies out, and a low aimless whistle begins to sound through his full lips. The scraping of the spoons begins again. Suddenly the air is rent by the sound of two*

*shotguns fired off almost simultaneously in the distance. The convicts spring to their feet with a howl and stand trembling with fear, some of them dropping their pans and food in the dirt. The Captain speaks soothingly to them:]* Never mind, boys, the guards are just celebrating a little. They ain't shooting nobody. [*Calling off in his great voice*] Ready to ride!

VOICE [*from the back*]. Yay-hoo!

SECOND VOICE [*likewise*]. Yo-ho!

*[The convicts settle down again on their haunches, some of them holding down empty pans disconsolately in their hands. The Captain walks over towards the row of figures. He stops before Pearly Gates, who is getting his hunk of fatback out of the dirt.]*

CAPTAIN. Why, Pearly, you let a gun firing off scare you too? I'm surprised.

PEARLY GATES [*grinning and gulping*]. Me too, Cap'n. Seems like I can't help it. [*Now showing his teeth in the same spasmodic grin and with a half-teasing, unctuous begging*] Bet they ain't no seconds for a good boy, is they, Cap'n?

CAPTAIN [*to the cook*]. What say, Greasy?

COOK [*croakingly, as he stares out before him with his bat's eyes*]. Ain't no seconds.

*[Pearly Gates begins eating his meat, dirt and all. The Captain smiles and moves on.]*

CAPTAIN [*stopping in front of the boy*]. What's the matter, son?

BOY [*struggling to make his tongue speak and at last getting out a few words*]. Not hungry, Cap'n.

CAPTAIN. Not hungry?

BOY. No, sir.

CAPTAIN. Sick?

BOY. Yessir, yessir.

CAPTAIN. Sorry to hear that. Wish I could fix you up a nice feather bed. Yessir, and give you a pretty little nurse to hold your hand and smooth your forehead. But we can't do that, son. [*Suddenly bending over him, his voice chilly as steel*] Eat them goddamn rations! [*With a terrified look the boy*



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*grabs up his plate and begins shovelling down the hated cabbage and side meat. And then suddenly his mouth flies open and he vomits them out again. The Captain backs away from him, bends over with his hands resting on his knees, and looks at him]* That little shooting upset you, huh?

BOY [*teetering back and forth on his heels and choking*]. I just can't eat it, Cap'n. I can't.

CAPTAIN. Not good enough, eh?

BOY [*watching him with ashy face*]. Yessir, it's all right, but I just can't eat it—I——

CAPTAIN. And how the hell you 'spect to roll your wheelbarrow if you don't eat?

BOY [*his words spluttering from him like a shower of crumbs*]. I'll keep it rolling, Cap'n, I'll keep it turning—I'll——

CAPTAIN [*sorrowfully*]. You didn't do it yesterday, son.

BOY [*whimpering*]. Yessir, yes, sir, I did.

CAPTAIN. Well, never mind, maybe you did. Anyhow, don't worry over your appetite, son. In a week or two you'll think fatback and cabbage are angel-cake. [*He straightens up, laughs quietly as if dismissing the subject, and then addresses them:*] You boys know what to-day is? [*No one answers.*] Hey, you, Pearly Gates, what is to-day?

PEARLY GATES. Lawd, Cap'n, I don't know.

CAPTAIN. What, my right-hand man and he don't know? [*To the bloated-faced white man at the right*] You, Hoppy, what day is it?

HOPPY. Dunno, sir.

CAPTAIN [*to a tall, sad-faced young fellow*]. You know, Careless Love?

CARELESS LOVE. Thursday, I think.

CAPTAIN. I'm ashamed of you fellows. Ain't you got no interest in your country? [*Snarling out at the boy, who jumps nervously*] What's to-day, son? What sets it apart from all other days?

BOY [*fearfully*]. It's the Fourth of July.

CAPTAIN. That's right, Bright Boy. Independence Day. [*Shouting at them*] Attenshun! [*They all spring to their feet and*

*stand with their tin pans in their hands.*] Forward, march!  
*[They move over towards the left, and, passing by the wheelbarrow, lay their utensils down, then form in a line as before. The two guards enter, one from the left, one from the right. The second guard is dressed like the first, is about the same age, and also has a double-barrelled shotgun in the crook of his arm. They are both gnawing sandwiches. The Captain calls out to them:]* Well, gentlemen, I thought you'd fell into the latrine and got drowned. *[A staccato burst of laughter is fired off among the convicts and then dies suddenly away as the Captain looks at them.]* I was just saying that this is the glorious Independence Day, the great day when Old King George got his tail bit off. Hum—hum. I used to shoot thunderbolts in my mammy's yard on Fourth of July. Years ago, years ago, I did. *[Holding up his left hand, from which two fingers are missing]* Got them fingers blown off that way. *[Pearly Gates snickers. The Captain looks over at him.]* I forgot you knew all about it, Pearly. *[To the convicts]* Well, he's right. A nigger bit 'em off long ago when I tried to arrest him for stealing a bushel of corn from old man Stewart. *[Reminiscing as he drops his hand]* Hum—hum, and when I drilled him with the cold steel he spit 'em out again—kerdab right in my face. And now, boys, since you know how it happened you needn't keep looking at my hand after this. *[His voice cracking out an order to the first guard]* All right, clean up!

FIRST GUARD *[adopting the authority of the Captain]*. Fall out!

*[The convicts fall out of line and begin policing the ground around the tent. The second guard finishes his sandwich and stands by the box. The Captain wanders over towards him.]*

CAPTAIN *[in a low voice]*. Anything stirring?

SECOND GUARD *[also in a low voice]*. Looks like he's got to have it, Cap'n.

CAPTAIN. Hum.

SECOND GUARD. Can't seem to quiet him down. Talk, talk, cry, cry. Nobody couldn't sleep last night.

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CAPTAIN [*softly*]. Bright Boy?

SECOND GUARD. Ah-hah, Bright Boy.

[*In the background the boy bends over for a bit of paper, then stops and looks questioningly around. The first guard touches him in the rump with the muzzle of his gun.*]

FIRST GUARD. Step along, Buster.

[*The boy darts forward, grabs up the bit of paper and begins searching the ground in front of him.*]

SECOND GUARD [*to the Captain*]. Been here a week and worse than ever.

CAPTAIN. He wants his mammy.

SECOND GUARD. Three days now and he says he's sick.

CAPTAIN. He ain't really sick.

SECOND GUARD. Oh, no; the thermometer said he weren't.

CAPTAIN. Ah-hah. He thinks we run a hospital.

SECOND GUARD. It ain't no hospital, is it?

CAPTAIN. Hell, no, it ain't that at all.

SECOND GUARD. And he thinks other things too. [*Pulling a spoon from his pocket*] Found that in his mattress last night.

CAPTAIN [*chuckling*]. Thought he'd make him a pewter file, did he?

SECOND GUARD. Looks like it.

[*The Captain takes it and looks at it.*]

CAPTAIN. They will try them little tricks at first.

[*He throws the spoon over into the wheelbarrow.*]

FIRST GUARD [*singing out from the rear*]. That's about all, Cap'n!

CAPTAIN. Okay, line up! [*The convicts, who have finished cleaning up, resume their places as before. The Captain moves out and stands before them, and the two guards stand at the right and left front facing towards the back. For a while every one waits as the Captain's eyes study the pitiful motley crew before him. Presently he breaks into a low musical laugh. The convicts look at him with a mixture of perplexity and fear. And then he speaks*]

*in an easy voice:*] I was just wondering, boys, whether I ought to make you that Fourth of July speech or not. What the hell good will it do? What say, Pearly? •

PEARLY GATES [*with his everlasting grin*]. Yessir, Cap'n, we'd sure like to hear you.

CAPTAIN. I ain't had a chance to make you a speech since last Easter, when I talked on the Resurrection. But orders from headquarters say I must call your attention to the occasion. [*Clearing his throat*] Well, boys, orders is orders, as some of you ain't never found out, and I take the privilege of our Independence Day of once more addressing a few words unto you. [*He waits a moment and then begins his flow of words.*] According to Statute Number Six Hundred and Forty-two of the Penal Code, duly proved and entered in the House of Representatives, so I'm told, by a vote of ninety-six to four, the punishment for constant trifling and belly-aching is twenty-nine blows with the whip. [*Stopping and eyeing them*] But did I ever whip a man that much? I say, did I?

PEARLY GATES. No, sir.

CARELESS LOVE. No, Cap'n.

CAPTAIN. You're damn' right I didn't. Also it prescribes old Black Aggie over there, and the goat, and chaining you up for various offences, such as trying to escape, plotting a mutiny, sex perversion, and crimes against nature. Yessir, that's what they tell me to do to you, and I'm nothing but the instrument of the voters' will. The voters say so, and what the voters say is law, ain't it?

HOPPY [*shifting his weight*]. It sure God is.

[*Some of the others nod their agreement, and all watch the Captain with roving, blinking eyes, except the boy, who stands with his head bowed.*]

CAPTAIN. Yessir, they've got the power, for this is a democracy, and democracy means the voice of the people. And the people—well, who are the people? Why, they are the grand old Daughters of the Revolution, and the Confederacy—the bishops and ministers of the Gospel—

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Episcopalians, the Baptists, the Methodists, and the Presbyterians, and all the Elks and the Kiwanis Clubs, the Rotarians, the Lions, the college presidents, the professors in the great institutions of learning, the folks that write books, and the lawyers—don't forget them. They are the people. They march to the polls and elect representatives and say pass the laws to keep the peace, and they pass the laws and they hand the laws over to me and say, "Twenty-nine blows!" Ain't it so? And they tell me to put Runt there in that sweatbox in solitary confinement for messing with his private organs. Yessir, they're the folks that fasten the chains and the shackles around your legs, ain't it so?

SEVERAL VOICES [*with more feeling*]. Yes, sir, Cap'n.

CAPTAIN [*with a snarl*]. The hell it is! You fellows put the chains around your own legs. You don't pass the laws, but you break 'em. [*He quiets his voice down and goes on more pleasantly:*] I reckon some of you think I'm hard, that I ain't got no feeling, that I'm a brutal slave-driver. Well, I ain't. You've heard me say it before and I'll say it again. I ain't enjoyed beating any one of you the whole time you been here. And I don't enjoy hearing Runt drumming inside that box no better than you do. But you're undergoing a course of training, and I'm the teacher, and I got to call it to your attention that this ain't no life for a human being to stay in. Behave yourselves, I say. Do what you're told, and get out of here quick as you can. Go back to the other world and start a new life. [*More persuasively*] Some of you boys have killed folks. You've robbed filling stations, burned houses, stole, and raped. Every one of you is in here for some reason. They didn't put you in here just because they liked to go around and catch you the way boys do birds and wring their necks. The great commonwealth of this state wishes every one of you was out of here. And I do too—wishes you were good, upright citizens. Yeh, citizens—you heard me. And that's what you're here for—to see if I can make citizens out of you. And how you going to do that? Not by lying in bed and

eating chocolate candy and having a 'lectric fan blowing over you. No, sir. If they made jails like that everybody'd be in jail and there'd be nobody outside of it. [*With a barking laugh*] Then what'd happen to me? I wouldn't have no job, would I?

[*The convicts relax their stony attitude a bit, for now the Captain is feeling his speechmaking power and his voice has grown mellow.*]

VOICES. Yes, sir, Cap'n, that's right.

CAPTAIN. And I try to be a good Cap'n to you, don't I?

VOICES [*more heartily*]. Yes, sir, Cap'n.

CAPTAIN. You're damn' right, I do. And I have a hard time of it, 'cause there are a lot of folks on the outside who keep snooping about, messing around, trying to tell you how to run things. Them university fellows come down here and leave their books, and I been reading one of 'em written by a fellow named Malcolm Winters. And what does he say? Why the man weeps tears, he does. He goes on page after page crying about the po' Negro, how we got to do this and that for him, got to raise him up. A lot of crap, every word of it. A nigger's a nigger. Ain't it so, Pearly Gates?

PEARLY GATES [*with his puppetlike spasmodic grin*]. That's Gospel, Cap'n.

CAPTAIN. Right. And you niggers that's in here didn't have sense enough to know that, and so you went around trying to stir up trouble by making yourselves equal to the white folks. Well, you got away easy. A lot of you ought to have been strung up to telegraph-poles and the limbs of trees, and you know it. Well, when you get out of here go back home and keep to your place, a nigger's place. And as for you white fellows, look at you. I been bossing convict camps for twenty years. More'n half the prisoners under me has been boys like Bright Boy there—hardly loose from their mother's apron-strings, just in the marble stage. What the devil's the matter with you? Well, I reckon it's them same mothers—they didn't know how to

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train you, petted and spoiled you. Well, I say it again—you won't be petted here. The course of sprouts I'm putting you through is a course of rawhide sprouts. And when I turn you loose you'll be hard as iron; you'll be men. You won't be wanting to go home to suck your mammy's sugar tit—no, sir. Hard, did I say? You heard me. For when the judge sentenced you here he said hard labour, and that's what I aim to make it. [*His voice now taking on an oratorical sonorous sweep*] For this ain't no boat trip on the river, this ain't no little gang of girls playing doll-babies. No, sir, not a bit of it. This ain't no circus full of hootchy-kootchy mommas strutting their hot stuff before your watery mouth. This ain't no riding on a Ferris wheel, or eating peanuts and popcorn and drinking cold drinks at a lemonade stand. No, it ain't, you bet your life. This is the chain gang, the chain gang. This is the ball and chain, the nine-pound hammer, the wheelbarrow, the shovel, the twenty-nine lashes, the seventy-two lashes, the sweatbox, the steel cage, the rifle, and the shotgun. You've heard about them two niggers, Hastings and Lane, in the next camp down the road. They didn't want to work. Well, old boss Magruder chained 'em up to the bars till their feet froze and rotted with gangrene and the doctor had to cut 'em off. Ain't that hard? Yes, that's a little bit hard. Shows you how hard I could be if I wanted to. Compared to that, the Runt is having an easy time of it in that sweatbox. [*The hard note coming suddenly back into his voice*] But some of you don't think so, do you? Bright Boy there—he says it's killing the Runt. I hear that he lies awake all night, making himself sick—worrying and moaning over poor Runt. Why, that's a pity, for I'm looking after Runt myself, and there ain't no use of both of us trying to do the same job. Is there? No, sir, there ain't. And Bright Boy will have to learn better. He'll have to get hard. I say it again, and that wise old judge he knew. Hard, he said. You heard me. For if you don't get hard you can't make your time, and if you don't make your time you can't pay your debt to the State. And

the only way you can pay it is by work. You can't pay by playing sick, by getting beat, by being shut up in the sweat-box, by being chained up till your feet fall off. That don't do nobody no good. It's work we want. Work the State wants. It's for that the great railroad company has hired you from the Governor. Yes, sir, the Governor has rented you out the way he would a mule or a shovel or a dragpan—hired you out to build that railroad. And, boys, you got to build it, 'cause they need coal down in Floridy, and they need oranges and musk-melons and bananas up there in New York. And the cotton has to get to the seaport, and the tobacco's got to get to the factory. And there's a world of shipping and trade got to happen, boys. And it all depends on you. [*Now his voice drops to a low singing croon.*] I know it's a hell of a life. It's a hell of a life for all of us—the shackles and the iron pin, the hammer and the ball. But, damn your son-of-a-bitching souls, I'm going to see that you wear 'em till the end! [*His voice dies out and he stands staring at the convicts, who shift themselves uneasily about. Then he smiles pleasantly at them.*] Well, boys, that's about all I've got to say. So we'll get on with the rest of the exercises as per the orders.

[*By this time the light has spread up the sky, and the figures of the raggle-taggle crew stand illuminated in it. The Captain moves around to the right, and begins walking slowly behind them, studying each man as he passes. They feel him there, apprehensively, some of them swaying nervously on their feet like saplings in a gentle wind. The Captain stops behind Hoppy.*]

CAPTAIN. Anything to complain of?

HOPPY [*stuttering and, like the other convicts, staring straight ahead of him*]. No, sir, no, sir, everything's fine.

CAPTAIN. Seems like yestiddy that little Georgy buggy needed greasing, huh?

HOPPY [*swallowing and gulping*]. I kept her rolling from sun to sun.



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CAPTAIN [*pleasantly*]. Like hell you did! Didn't the wheel get stuck every once in a while and wouldn't turn?

HOPPY. No, sir, no, sir. But just watch me, boss, watch me to-day.

[*And his great trembling hand goes up and wipes the popping sweat from his forehead.*]

CAPTAIN. Don't mind, we'll have to grease it for you, son, the first thing you know. [*And as he looks at Hoppy's shaking form, a half-affectionate smile plays on his swarthy face. For a moment longer he stares at him, and then moves on to the next man. A sigh, a long half-inaudible sigh, escapes from Hoppy's lips. The Captain turns and gazes at him.*] Don't let me scare you, Snowbird! [*And now he stops behind the boy.*] So you're sick, hah?

[*His voice is brittle and steely, a new note in it. A shiver seems to run the length of the dirty, grey-striped line. The boy looks out before him with wide frightened eyes and ashy face.*]

BOY. Yes, sir, yes, sir, I'm sick.

CAPTAIN. Hum. When a man's sick he's got a fever, ain't he? And when he's got a fever the thermometer says so, don't it? Well, the thermometer says you ain't got no fever. Therefore you ain't sick.

BOY [*in a low, agonized pleading*]. Please, sir, please.

CAPTAIN [*suddenly pulling Old Jeff out of the cuff of his boot and touching the boy on the shoulder*]. This way, son.

BOY [*terror-stricken*]. But I been doing all right, Cap'n. They ain't been any complaint, has they, none you've heard of?

CAPTAIN [*kindly*]. This way, son.

[*Guard number one comes up in front of him and touches him in the stomach with his gun.*]

FIRST GUARD. You heard him.

BOY [*his hands suddenly fluttering aimlessly in the air, his breath sucked through his lips with a gasp*]. Oh, Lord, have mercy! Mercy!

CAPTAIN. So you're callin' on the Lord? Well, the

Lord ain't here. The Lord is far away. In fact you might say this ain't no place for the Lord.

BOY [*whispering*]. Cap'n, Cap'n!

CAPTAIN. I know you need medicine, son. That's what we're going to give you. Maybe after that you won't be sick. Maybe you won't talk so much either.

BOY [*wailing and bobbing his head against his breast*]. I'm sick, bad sick, I tell you!

CAPTAIN [*snarling*]. And I reckon the man you killed was sick too when you soused that knife in him.

BOY [*gasping*]. I didn't kill him. I didn't, I tell you. They put the blame on me!

CAPTAIN. Oh, you didn't? But the jury said so. This way, son.

*[And now, with the lash of the whip clasped against the butt, he reaches out, hooks the loop over the boy's neck, and jerks him backward. The boy shakes as if with an ague, and stands with half-bent knees, about to fall. The second guard moves through the gap in the line and takes him by the arm.]*

SECOND GUARD. Step back.

*[He pushes him towards the rear.]*

CAPTAIN. Pull your pants down, son.

BOY [*moaning*]. Cap'n, Cap'n.

CAPTAIN. Don't you call on me—'cause I'm like the Lord. I can't hear you either. Unbutton your pants. [*Snarling*] I say, unbutton your pants! Don't let me tell you thrice, as the Son of God said to the rooster.

*[And now with a wild and desperate look around and with a sudden vague gesture in the air the boy slowly begins to undo his belt. The cook at the left front, who has continued cleaning up unconcernedly, piles the tub and pan on the plates in the wheelbarrow and rolls it away to the left. And now the first guard steps several paces to the front and lays his gun at the menacing 'Ready,' across his forearm.]*

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SECOND GUARD. Bend over, son.

*[The boy's knees sag, he falls forward and lies with his face in the dirt, his arms outstretched. The convicts stand in a stiff line, their eyes staring straight ahead of them, their lips tightly shut.]*

CAPTAIN *[calling]*. Come hold his feet, Pearly Gates!

*[And now, like frightened animals before an approaching storm, the convicts suddenly shrink closer together, and the boy's prone body is hidden from view.]*

PEARLY GATES *[twisting his shoulders and flinging his hands together in front of his stomach]*. He'll be good, Cap'n, he'll lie still.

CAPTAIN *[yelling]*. Come hold his feet! *[Pearly Gates leaves his place at the end of the line and goes gingerly around to the rear. The convicts stand like a row of stony-faced Indians, outlined against the red light of the approaching sun, the Captain's face showing above them.]* Boys, let this be another warning to you. It's been a month now since I had to use the lash. But some of you keep trying to dead-beat me.

*[Now the lids of his eyes are snapped back and his dark-brown pupils are filled with a fiery demoniac light. Suddenly, like a flash, he whirls back towards the recumbent figure, raises himself up on the balls of his feet, and brings the whip down with a whistling tearing sound. Though we do not see it the boy's body bounds from the ground like a rubber ball, and with a cry Pearly Gates flings himself upon his plunging feet. But no sound comes from the boy's lips. At this first blow a gust of horror seems to sweep the line of convicts, and they waver back and forth and then stand still, their eyes lifted and set towards the vast and empty sky. Once more the Captain brings his whip down, and the convicts flinch as if their own backs had felt the lash. Then, at the third blow, a wild hysterical scream bursts from the boy's lips.]*

BOY [*with a shriek*]. Mamma! Mamma!

[*At the fourth blow he begins to whimper. And at the fifth and sixth blows the wild animal scream tears once more from his body. At the seventh and eighth blows he begins whimpering again like a baby, the sound of his piteous, crying rising and then sinking again like a child crying itself to sleep. And then at the tenth blow the Captain suddenly stops.*

CAPTAIN [*curtly*]. Button his diaper. [*Thundering*] Turn him loose, Pearly Gates! [*A moment passes and then the huge Negro backs towards his place at the end of the line, staring hypnotically before him where the gasping figure lies. Presently the Captain comes around to the front, doubles up the whip, crams it into his boot and stands gazing at the convicts in silence. The second guard now pushes the shuddering boy back to his place and helps him fasten his belt across his jerking quivering stomach. As he moves away from him the boy spins drunkenly about, and as he is falling the guard catches him and steadies him on his feet. The boy stands there moaning and shaking, his eyes closed, the tears wetting his cheeks. The second guard moves over to the right front, holding his gun before him. For a while the Captain is silent, as if his mind were wrapped away from the scene. Then, as the boy's weeping dies down to an almost inaudible whimper, he looks up.*] I let him off easy this time, boys, because it's the Fourth of July. [*Gesturing to the two guards*] All right, gentlemen, give us another little salute to the morning sun. For this is the day the Thirteen Original States freed themselves from the bloody Englishmen. Fee-fi-fo-fum. [*The guards raise their guns and fire a volley towards the sunrise. The convicts tremble and shudder, their eyes rolling in their haggard faces. The Captain laughs softly.*] Hooray!

FIRST GUARD [*loudly*]. Hooray for the Fourth of July!

SECOND GUARD [*more loudly*]. Hooray for the United States!

CAPTAIN. That's right. [*To the convicts*] Come on, boys, give us a cheer for your country. [*A feeble cheer finally breaks*

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*from their twitching lips.*] Damn it, don't you love Uncle Sam better'n that? Come on—once more.

*[The cheer is given a bit more loudly, but by empty, wooden voices.]*

FIRST GUARD *[calling out]*. All right, Bright Boy, we ain't heard from you.

•*[The boy tries to control his quivering shoulders.]*

CAPTAIN *[interposing]*. Never mind, he'll do it next Fourth of July. *[Pulling a crumpled sheet of paper from his pocket, he smooths it out and looks over at the convicts pleasantly.]* Order of the day so certifies that before we set forth to work it shall be the duty of the boss to have a rendition of *America* sung by the prisoners. *[He puts the sheet of paper back into his pocket.]* Any you fellows know the tune? *[No one answers.]* I say, do any of you know it? *[The convicts shake their heads.]* How about you, Bright Boy? *[The boy stands staring at the ground.]* I say, do you know the song?

*[The boy's figure gives a spasmodic jerk.]*

BOY *[in a muffled voice]*. Yes, sir.

CAPTAIN. All right, lead it off.

*[The boy hesitates, gulps once or twice, and then, lifting his eyes towards the sky, begins to sing in a clear, beautiful voice.]*

BOY.

My country, 'tis of thee,  
Sweet land of liberty,  
Of thee I sing.

CAPTAIN *[thundering at the convicts]*. Take off your caps!

*[The convicts pull off their caps. The Captain raises his hand in a salute, and the two guards present arms. The boy continues singing, some of the convicts mumble along with him, and the Captain brays out a stave or two.]*

VOICES *[led by the boy]*.

Land where my fathers died,  
Land of the pilgrims' pride,

PAUL GREEN

From every mountain-side  
Let freedom ring.

*[At the end of the first stanza the Captain drops his hand, the two guards set their guns down, and the convicts stop singing. But the boy continues.]*

BOY.

My native country, thee,  
Land of the noble free,  
Thy name I love.

CAPTAIN *[sharply]*. All right! You can stop. *[The boy stops singing, drops his head on his breast, and stares at the ground again. The Captain turns and goes over to the box at the right front.]* And now, boys, as another honour for the occasion, I'm going to do a good turn for the Runt. And I'm going to break the law to do it. The voters prescribe twenty-one days for the Runt. Yessir, that's what they prescribe in the House of Representatives. But I'm letting him out on the eleventh day. *[He unlocks the door to the box, and flings it open.]* All right, Runt, roll out. *[Inside the box we can see a little skinny Negro doubled up like a baby in its mother's womb, his head stuck between his knees.]* Roll out, Runt.

*[But there is no movement from the doubled-up form. The Captain reaches in, takes the Negro by the collar, pulls him out, and drops his head against the ground. The figure lies still. The Captain stares at it. A murmur of fear runs among the convicts. The second guard steps over and peers at the bundle of rags.]*

SECOND GUARD *[feeling the bony chest]*. Say, you better——

*[The Captain drops down on his knees, lays his hand on the Negro's heart. He squats there a moment, and then rises abruptly to his feet and stands staring thoughtfully at the body.]*

CAPTAIN. Ain't that a hell of a note!

FIRST GUARD *[now coming forward]*. He was okay a few minutes ago.

CAPTAIN. Yeh, but he ain't now. Yeh, that's right, I

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remember—I ain't heard him making no fuss since I first come in. Hum—hum. [*Turning towards the convicts*] Well, boys, the Runt's gone from us. He's dead. [*A murmur runs through the line, and the prisoners take off their caps in awed respect. But the boy's cap remains on his bowed head, for he is paying no attention to what goes on around him. The cook comes in at the left with a glass of water and a piece of bread held priest-like before him. The Captain looks up.*] Runt won't need his breakfast to-day, Greasy.

[*The cook stops and gazes impassively down at the body.*

COOK [*croakingly*]. Didn't think he'd make it.

CAPTAIN. The hell you say! Then why didn't you tell me he was getting sick in there?

COOK [*still impassively*]. I did. Yesterday I said let's take him out—Cap'n, I said.

CAPTAIN. You fool! When did you feed him last?

COOK [*with his old man's toothless snicker*]. Feed him, Cap'n?

CAPTAIN. Well, give him his bread and water, then?

COOK. Yestiddy—the way the orders say. He cried a little and said he was gonna die in that box, and I told him I reckon he would.

CAPTAIN. Yeh, and the bastard did.

[*He stands thinking a moment.*

COOK. And he said you could bury him up on the railroad fill, 'cause he didn't have no home and no folks.

CAPTAIN. He told you that?

COOK. Yessir. And I said I didn't think you would on account of the law.

CAPTAIN. What law?

COOK. I dunno, Cap'n, just some law, I reckon.

CAPTAIN [*wrathfully*]. I'll bury him where I damn please.

COOK. Yessir, he said he wanted to be buried up here so he could hear the trains run at night.

[*He turns and goes on out at the left, carrying the glass of water priest-like before him.*

CAPTAIN [*to the prisoners*]. That's right, boys. You

remember how Runt liked to hear the trains blow. What you say? Shall we take him up there and bury him? [*The convicts look at him with dull cold eyes.*] Well, I don't blame you for feeling bad over it. I do myself. All right, we will. It's his last wish, and the wishes of the dead are sacred. We all know that. [*Now standing over Runt and looking sorrowfully down at him*] You know me, Runt, I didn't have no grudge against you. It was the law said do it. [*With sudden blinding rage*] Yeh, the law! [*Then after a moment, more quietly*] All right, we'll put you away like you wanted. [*With a chuckle*] But how the hell you gonna hear them trains running at night and your ears packed full of clay? [*Now looking pensively beyond the convicts at the light flooding up the eastern sky*] Yeh, we'll put him up there in a hole. And soon the cross-ties will be laid—the rails strung out, and the steel-driving men sink the spikes down. And Runt won't care, will he? Runt won't care. Night and day the great trains will be running over old Runt's bones, running from the big cities up north to the Floridy pleasure-grounds and back again, carrying the President and his folks maybe, the big bosses from France and Rooshy, and the tobacco kings, pimps and bawds, the gamblers and the bridal couples and the Congressmen, the lieutenants and the generals, all pulled along by the fiery iron horse with its one eye. "Hah, hah, hah," it snorts. "Get out of my way. You can harness down the earth and the sun and the moon, but you can't put a check-rein on me. 'Cause I'm bound for Key West, and I'm going to run right off the deep end and drown the whole goddamned load in the Atlantic Ocean." Yes, by Christ, and I hope it does! [*The cook comes in at the left with a pail of water and a mop and begins to wash off the table. The Captain bends down and picks up Runt's frail little form in his arms. He looks along the line of convicts a moment, and then steps towards Pearly Gates, who draws back with a shudder.*] All right, Pearly, take him. He stinks like a buzzard, but he can't hurt you now. [*Pearly still draws back, but the Captain drapes the crooked body over the huge Negro's*



# HYMN TO THE RISING SUN

shoulder. Pulling a whistle from his belt, he blows two sharp blasts, then barks out] R-i-g-h-t face! [The convicts obey, but the boy stands staring at the ground as before. Careless Love pushes him around in line, and we can see the seat of his trousers showing sopping wet with blood.] Forward, mar-ch! Hep-hep— [The convicts start marching out at the right, the second guard going before. The Captain calls back to the first guard:] Better fill out the death certificate.

FIRST GUARD [dropping the butt of his gun lazily to the ground]. Regular form?

CAPTAIN. Hep-hep— Hell, yes! [And now Pearly Gates, the last of the line, goes out, carrying Runt's dead body like a sack on his shoulder. The Captain follows after, his heavy boots marching in step, and his voice calling rhythmically] Hep-hep-hep! [The cook goes on mopping the table. The first guard yawns and stretches his arms, gun and all, above his head.]

FIRST GUARD. Well, I better get busy on that certificate—Old Doc Eilers might want it to-day. Uhm—and then some sleep. [He starts out at the left rear, then stops and calls back:] What was Runt's name?

COOK [still intent on his scrubbing]. Just Runt, I reckon.

FIRST GUARD. I remember now—Johnson—Vanderbilt Johnson. [With a snicker] What you reckon he died of? [The cook makes no answer.] Heart-failure, maybe— [With certainty] Sure—his heart give out on him—weak heart—natural causes. Hum. [Looking off towards the east] Golly, to-day's gonna be another scorcher.

[He goes out. The cook finishes scouring the table, then brings his utensils over to the sweatbox. Dipping his mop into the pail, he starts cleaning out the fouled inside. In the distance the faint sound of the Captain's "Hep-hep . . ." is heard dying away as he marches the convicts to their appointed toil.]

COOK [suddenly beginning to sing in a flat froglike voice as he works].

PAUL GREEN

Land where—my fathers died,  
Land of—the pilgrims' pride—

[*And now, peering up over the rim of the world at the  
back, comes the smiling face of the sun.*]

CURTAIN

GLOSSARY

- Page 21. "Shet your face"=shut up.  
27. "Fill"=railway embankment.  
30. "Thunderbolts"=fireworks.  
32. "House of Representatives": the Assembly. The lower House of the *State* Government.  
32. "Daughters of the Revolution": an influential organization, whose members are descended from men who fought in the American Revolution. The members of the "Daughters of the Confederacy" are descended from men who fought for the South in the war between the states, 1861-65.  
35. "Hootchy-kootchy mommas"=belly-dancers.  
36. "Georgy buggy"="Georgia buggy"=wheelbarrow.  
41. "America": an anthem sung to the tune of "God Save the King." The national anthem is "The Star-spangled Banner," and not "America."  
44. "Key West": a city at the south end of Florida; the southernmost city in the United States.

## *The United States*

### CLIFFORD ODETS: "TILL THE DAY I DIE"

THE talent of Clifford Odets is one of the most striking discovered during recent years. Eighteen months ago he was unknown. Then came the production of his *Awake and Sing* in February 1935, and of his long one-acts, *Till the Day I Die* and *Waiting for Lefty*, in March. In May came a brief but interesting monologue, *I Can't Sleep*, and near the end of the same year another full-length play, *Paradise Lost*.

In one year, therefore, five of Odets' plays were acted in New York City. Not only did he write a play better than the Pulitzer Prize play of the year—an achievement so common that it has ceased to be a distinction—but he had a measure of recognition nearly unprecedented in the American theatre. It was agreed that he was the most promising new American dramatist, and one super-ecstatic critic went so far as to write, "I want to make no reservations in saying that this young man is a far greater figure than O'Neill ever was or will be," to be answered cautiously by a more conservative commentator, "I cannot see why to praise one you have to dispraise the other."

It is trite to speak of the 'secret' of a playwright. It is vainglorious to pretend to write upon it. If the 'secret' were easy to discover it would be unearthed by one of the thousand other playwrights who are hunting for fame and fortune, and who ask nothing better than a privy knowledge whose application will lead infallibly to the composition of successful and distinguished plays.

Without concerning ourselves, therefore, with 'secrets,'

we may indicate some of the qualities which are to be found in all of Odets' writings, and which lend them a certain family resemblance.

He has something to say. He is impassioned. He is aflame against the injustices which exist in the world, and would like to remedy all of them. He is a propagandist, a 'Leftist,' an anti-capitalist, an anti-Nazi, a worker for the 'united front,' and his utterance is tumultuous and emphatic. The theatre is not the stage, but the 'theatre front.' He demands "a new consciousness of what the theatre can and must mean in our country to-day!" "I am no believer in art for art's sake. At least once before I die I would like to write a fine revolutionary play."

Therefore the propaganda play—with the result that audiences which care nothing at all for his preaching, and whose members will continue to believe and to vote exactly as in the past, are interested in his people, impressed by his sincerity, aroused by his eloquence, and thrilled and satisfied by his action. Away with the playwrights who "discussed the problems of 1492 and 1669. They earnestly examined their navels, and told audiences what they found. Art must be about something. It must be hot and spiteful."

To him the thing that matters is the "hot and spiteful"; but to audiences of capitalists, employers, bosses, men who are on top and propose to remain on top, and their wives, it is the art that comes first. They may disagree with what he says, but, like Voltaire, they will defend to the death his right to say it—and their own right to enjoy it. "The Red front, the united front!" cries Odets. "Tell us all about them," say the magnates, buying the choicest seats in the theatre. And Odets tells, hoping to make converts.

Later on what he said is discussed by men and women in evening dress, who realize that the period creates the movement, and not the reverse; who are aware that forces mould the man, including Odets and themselves, and that capitalist and Communist alike are grains of sand which will be tossed about and rounded by powers that neither can

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control. Perhaps *après nous le déluge*. Perhaps not. But the fine revolutionary play has been a fine play.

Let us examine *Till the Day I Die* from the standpoint of technique, completely disregarding its propaganda.

As always, Odets creates an initial suspense. If the essence of drama, as the editor has suggested elsewhere, is concern for the future happiness of the persons who are involved in a situation which, for that reason, we call 'dramatic,' then Odets provides it at the very beginning. Here is no atmosphere of peace, of quiet contentment with life. Here are men and women who are unhappy and not resigned, who suffer and propose to do something about it, and above whom the menacing clouds of a hostile environment gather immediately.

They are anything but inarticulate. They speak with savage violence and brutal directness. They are not elegant. Their words do not conceal their thoughts. They mirror them as they are, turbulent, half-formulated perhaps, but always sincere. Even his educated men talk what we should call bad English: "You kept coming up in my eyes like the sense of tears"; "Our work is bearing fruit. In that beautiful classic country"; "The whole thing funnels up in me like fever"; "This way, this is a secret eating thing between us." This is Bronx<sup>1</sup> English, such as Odets has heard spoken on every side of him; and the letter reproduced farther on in this study shows that he can, if he wishes to, write 'better.' But he does not wish to when he is creating dialogue. His lines are horrible and ungrammatical; they are rough as burrs; but, like burrs, they stick long after the polished elegancies of others are forgotten.

The thought races beyond the word. When Major Duhring is calm he talks correctly. When his emotions begin to master him he loses his command of language and bursts out: "A great sermon requiem is being played." What, pray, is a "sermon requiem"? How can a sermon be

<sup>1</sup> The borough of the Bronx, New York City, largely inhabited by foreign-born immigrants and their descendants.

"played"? But the meaning is clear, and the effect is splendid.

Odets' powers of invention, to which we shall refer in greater detail presently, are prodigious. His main action is made immeasurably more powerful—and more interesting—by a dozen minor actions. Every scene develops his fundamental story, and at the same time enhances it by weaving it into a pattern to which the life-currents of other characters contribute brilliantly coloured threads. Never, for an instant, does he bore us.

He begins violently, and he piles scene on scene with an instinct for *crescendo*. There is a limit to that kind of thing: when the orchestra reaches *fortissimo* it can play no louder. Therefore he alternates his *fortissimi*, which are deafening, with his *pianissimi*, which are sometimes even more thrilling. A typist who cannot type—enter Ernst—"You deny belonging to the underground party?"—"Such sensitive hands." . . . "Beethoven's *Opus Sixty-one*, the violin concerto? In the key of D?" Schlegel brings down the butt of the rifle on Ernst's fingers, smashing them. Schlegel roars: "With the Joachim cadenza?" "Take him out of my sight."—"Hitler is lonely too. So is God." What on earth can come next? Schlegel examines Adolph's face between his hands: "You're as fickle as a girl."

We need not consider whether or not the premises of the play are just: the writing is masterly. The *crescendo* cannot increase for ever, therefore there are instants of quiet so that the storm may break with renewed force. This is true not only of the scenes themselves, but of the arrangement of the scenes, one after another. The general and the particular, orientation with respect to the world, and then orientation with respect to the individual: the orchestra plays; a solo instrument speaks; the orchestra resumes; the soloist once more. The underground press; the fortunes of one man who is caught in the trap; the fortunes of many men in that trap; the one man and the captor who himself is caught, and so on. An environment: an individual is singled out

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from it. There is action. He is correlated anew with the environment. He is singled out again. There is new action. He is correlated again. An environment does not change. An individual does. The individual is crushed. It may be propaganda to some, including the author, but "a great sermon requiem is being played" for others.

Therefore there is suspense, there is passion, there is harsh, uncouth eloquence, in which the ugly speeches, short and to the point, are the servants of thought that is heavy with emotional cast. Finally there are uncomplicated characters, sincere whether they be good or bad, forthright in their virtues and vices, crashing into one another blindly and often not blindly, but bruising their ways through life towards the tragedy that waits. It is a drama in which the externals matter less, both to the author and to his characters, than the driving-forces which underlie both.

That Odets' earnestness as propagandist leads to jarring blunders is not to be denied. His hopes sometimes speak louder than his logic.

Ernst has been arrested by the Nazis. A storm-trooper passing him in the room in which he is to be questioned "whispers 'Courage.'" This is nonsensical, and does not help the play.

Duhring is not only contradictory to himself, as he admits, but is contradictory to life. He is "married into one of the finest old German families," yet was once openly a proletarian. In Germany such things have not happened and do not happen—unless the wife is far stronger-minded than is Hedvig. Holding a high position under Hitler, he "harms no foe of the Nazi state. . . . My work may often be interpreted as a positive hindrance. . . . I destroyed three files of valuable information against your comrades this morning." Only an insane man would take such a risk, and only an insane man would believe that his action would help the 'comrades.' With his background he might not be pro-Hitler, but he would be resolutely anti-Communist,

a fact to which the author closes his eyes. Even if we grant everything else, it is incredible that a man who has reached a position of power through adroitness and with the help of an easily adjusted conscience should commit suicide because he killed a subordinate whose knowledge that he is a quarter-Jew is the only cloud on Duhring's horizon. The same adroitness which brought him to power would extricate him from what, to a superior officer in a country where rank is everything, is only a trifling embarrassment. Instead he kills himself—and Ernst, the Communist, is found leaving a room in which are the bodies of two dead Nazi officers. It is not conceivable that his tale, that one of them shot the other and then himself, will be accepted. It is not conceivable that Ernst will be permitted to live—yet he does.

Frau Duhring, in the same scene, is as incredible as is her husband. She slaps the arrested Communist with her glove—because the author wishes to make her contemptible, yet he succeeds only in making her impossible. The act is a strange one for any well-bred woman, and in Germany would be an unthinkable one for a member of a class whose pride condemns to lasting disgrace an officer who, for any reason whatsoever, has drawn his sword, the emblem of his honour, on a commoner.

Some of these blunders are due to the fact that the author shares the impetuosity of his characters; other are attributable to his lack of knowledge of Germany.

A pistol "of 38 calibre" is unknown in a country where calibres are expressed in millimetres, and which, making both the Luger and the Mauser, does not import small-arms from abroad. And "the whole automatic charge" is one solid bullet, which would not cause instant death when fired into the abdomen, and would permit Schlegel to overhear what follows.

The Nazi detective, "Popper," bears a name which is always, invariably Hebraic. There are no such names as "Zelda," "Tausig," and "Edsel" in Germany, and



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"Duhring" is doubtful. "Taussig" and "Dühring," yes; but the others are comparable only to the would-be English names, "Jankins," "Senderson," and "McArty," occasionally encountered in French writing.

There are neither captains nor majors in the *Sturm-Abteilung*, the 'storm troops.' Nearly all of the titles in that organization end in *fuehrer*, indicating 'squad-leader,' 'platoon-leader,' and the like.<sup>1</sup> A title carried over from the army is of social value only, and the former army lieutenant may be the superior of the former colonel. Roehm, an ex-captain, was the superior of former generals, including Prince August-Wilhelm, son of the Kaiser.

A trooper refers to "tearing telephone books." German telephone books are not thick enough to be useful for exhibitions of strength, and the feat is unknown there. Mackensen is "Macksen" in the original edition. "Hedvig," pronounced in that manner, should be spelled "Hedwig." And Ernst, in the final scene, is in possession of a gun which he could neither have begged, borrowed, bought, nor stolen.

It is a tribute to the emotional sweep of the play that its errors remain undetected when one witnesses a performance. The author has created a world for us. We accept everything in it without cavil.

The antecedents of the play are interesting and unusual.

Soon after the accession of Hitler a well-educated Communist, one Karl Billinger, was arrested and imprisoned. First taken to Columbia House in Berlin, he was later transferred to a concentration camp. After months of suffering he escaped.

An article dealing with his experiences appeared in an American periodical in the fall of 1934. It was read by

<sup>1</sup> The *S. A. Mann* is a *Stürmer*. His superiors are *Rottenfuehrer*, *Sturmschar*, *Oberscharfuehrer*, *Truppfuehrer*, *Obertruppfuehrer*, *Sturm-fuehrer*, *Obersturm-fuehrer*, *Sturmhaupfuehrer*, *Sturm-bannfuehrer*, *Obersturm-bannfuehrer*, *Standartfuehrer*, *Oberfuehrer*, *Brigadefuehrer*, *Gruppfuehrer*, *Obergruppfuehrer*, and *Stabschef*.

Odets, then an unknown writer. He sympathized, and the details Billinger supplied furnished a background for the story referred to in the first paragraph of the letter which follows, and which he had been developing in his mind. In four nights he had completed *Till the Day I Die*.

It is important to make clear at once that Odets is not to be blamed for having used 'local colour' provided by Billinger. On the contrary, he would have been most blameworthy had he failed to use that material. When a dramatist deals with history it is his business to inform himself, and it is his right—ethical and legal—as it is his duty, to use enough fact to make his play convincing. Billinger's narrative, subsequently expanded in his book, *Fatherland* (Farrar and Rinehart, New York, 1935), will be dwelt upon here for two reasons: its study, in connexion with the play, illustrates one of the cardinal points of technique—that persuasiveness is more important than the accident of actual occurrence; and because that same study reveals the brilliance with which the playwright improvised upon a theme.

The editor wrote, in his *The Craftsmanship of the One-Act Play*:

Too much emphasis cannot be laid upon the importance of artistic selection. That a thing has 'really happened' is no valid reason why it should be transplanted bodily to the stage. If it contains the substance of drama it may be drawn upon—with discrimination. But the mere fact that it has 'happened' is no more in its favour than the fact that it has not been known to happen would be against it. It may be disorderly, disjointed, improbable, unconvincing, without satisfactory beginning, development, or end. It may be true and possess none of the persuasive attributes of truth. The audience is far more concerned with "Could it happen?" than with "Did it happen?" It will grant premises freely; it may balk at conclusions.

In reply to a letter referring to the preceding, and referring also to Billinger's book, Mr Odets wrote:

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\* The only consciously used material for *Till the Day I Die* was a reprinted letter in *The New Masses*. This merely stated that a certain German Red had undergone extensive tortures until he broke down and was forced to kill himself in order to save his honour. The letter also stated that neither Right nor Left could any longer trust him. The letter was written by the brother of this victim.

Billinger's book I have never read, but certain Nazi procedure is common knowledge of all newspaper readers. No, I take it back. I think one chapter of Billinger was in *The New Masses*; and I may have used some facts from it.

But the rest of the play is very thoroughly fiction. All of the incidents connected with musical ideas are imaginative. I must admit, incidentally, that the play was a very hasty job—done in four nights. So the genesis of many of the ideas used is hazy in my mind.

But I certainly agree with your thesis: the 'it actually happened' is not very important. As a matter of fact I am for ever clipping items from the newspapers, for ever making copious notes. But I don't remember ever once referring to a clipping when I started writing a scene. However, I find the clippings and notes valuable in the sense that they set up in me unconscious reactions and adjustments to my material. I mean an unconscious distillation takes place. Your 'it could have happened' is the result.

Let us examine Billinger's contributions in detail.

"Anna cut the stencils on her office typewriter," he writes. "Martin and I worked the mimeograph machine. . . . The workers hungered for news of the Party. . . . Some deserted to the Nazis and informed against our comrades."

These few lines are the nucleus of the first scene: the mimeograph, the traitor Zeltner-Zerrago, the underground newspaper.

Odets' improvements are so obvious that it is unnecessary to point them out. Billinger's work was that of the reporter: a brief statement of fact. Odets brought to it the insight, the emotion, and the invention of a creative artist. \*

The second scene begins with a detail contributed by Billinger—"There were fruitless calls for a typist"—and bettered by Odets, and continues with the Ernst-Schlegel scene, wholly invented by Odets, and to be described only as one of the most powerful and effective scenes in modern drama. Schlegel's series of speeches and the action which intersperses are not to be discussed without the use of superlatives. The speech beginning "What I have against the Communists is the snout-like narrowness of their non-Nordic jaws" is inspired writing, vivid, concrete, creating an almost unendurable suspense. The action, and the inspired line that tops it: the reference to the Joachim cadenza and then the theme so suddenly introduced in the gentle fall to a close show how formidable are the playwright's powers of invention.

Billinger contributes heavily to the third scene: the men standing against the wall; the guards playing cards and drinking beer; the old man who is kicked and punched; the prisoners who enter with a half-hearted "Heil Hitler"; the boy, arrested for distributing pamphlets, who claims ignorance of the contents of the boxes, and wanted the five marks he was offered. Billinger describes how the boy is knocked down. He states that "the goal was to knock down the prisoner, no matter how strong he was, with one blow to the temple." He states how those that had been so treated were court-plastered. Billinger quotes a newspaper headline: "Slaughter of R. B. and R. F. L. Comrades by Hitler's Brown Murder Hordes."

All of this Odets uses—because while a playwright may invent a story he may not invent 'local colour': he must use what there is. But now comes improvisation, perfect in key, emotional in content, and so convincing that it is impossible for the uninformed student to detect where imagination begins and fact leaves off. Every word of dialogue, needless to say, is Odets' own creation. It is more than adequate. And here Billinger, having supplied a setting, leaves the picture, and the play climbs upward,

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always upward, for four scenes more. The relation between the men is the same as that between the civil engineer and the architect: the first furnishes essential information concerning the site, its location, its peculiarities, its conditions; the second builds upon it an edifice which reaches towards the stars.

Inevitably *Hymn to the Rising Sun* and *Till the Day I Die* will be compared. From the standpoint of technique the former is probably sounder. No guard hisses to Bright Boy, "Courage!" The death of Runt is as unimportant to the Captain as the death of Schlegel could be to Duhring. Of the two plays Green's is the truer to life as we know it—or as we think we know it.

Both are propaganda, and the objectivity of the first, by the older and more experienced writer, is more effective than the partisan subjectivity of the second. The first is likely to make more converts.

Pictorially, Odets' work is better. His swift alternations of light and shade are remarkable. The dialogue of the plays should be contrasted; poetry is lacking in the second; it suffuses the first. The philosophies are different. Both works rise to emotional heights, both accentuate scenes of extreme brutality, but the first is pessimistic, while the second, perhaps mistakenly, is optimistic. Perhaps humanity is moving towards a gentler creed, but there is nothing in present history to indicate it.

It is not the function of the editor to discuss the political implications of the plays. It is proper for him, however, to point out that punishments in prison camps of the Southern states are designed chiefly to accelerate labour, while in Fascist Europe, if the allegations made by many writers are true, they are designed to accelerate death. It is equally proper to point out that the population of the prison camps consists chiefly of manual labourers who have committed crimes against the person, while that of the concentration

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camps is said to consist of intellectuals whose offences have been political.

America recognizes the existence of the prison camp as a blot on its honour. It would be regrettable if the fault of America were used to condone such graver faults as may exist elsewhere in the world.

*The United States*

TILL THE DAY I DIE

A PLAY

By CLIFFORD ODETS

*Copyright 1935, 1936 by Clifford Odets*

## CHARACTERS

CARL TAUSIG	3RD STORM TROOPER
BAUM	4TH STORM TROOPER
ERNST TAUSIG	5TH STORM TROOPER
TILLY	BOY
ZELDA	OLD MAN
DETECTIVE POPPER	OTHER PRISONERS
MARTIN, <i>an orderly</i>	MAJOR DUHRING
EDSEL, <i>another orderly</i>	FRAU DUHRING
CAPTAIN SCHLEGEL	1ST DETECTIVE
ADOLPH	2ND DETECTIVE
ZELTNER	SECRETARY
WEINER	ARNO
PELTZ	STIEGLITZ
1ST STORM TROOPER	JULIUS
2ND STORM TROOPER	WOMEN

*The action takes place in present-day Berlin.*

SCENE 1: *An underground room.*

SCENE 2: *Office room in the Columbia Brown House.*

SCENE 3: *Barracks room, Brown House.*

SCENE 4: *Office room.*

SCENE 5: *Tilly's room.*

SCENE 6: *An underground meeting-room.*

SCENE 7: *Carl's room.*

*Till the Day I Die* was suggested by a letter from Germany printed in *The New Masses*.

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# TILL THE DAY I DIE

## SCENE I

*A small room underground in Berlin to-day.*

*A small man with a rueful face, named Baum, is silently operating a hectograph machine. Watching him are the two brothers, Ernst and Carl Tausig. Downstage at a long littered table sits an alert girl who is concentrated on work before her. Her name is Tilly Westermann. The two brothers watch the operating machine for some time. Carl finally picks up a leaflet which has just come from the machine. Scans it, replaces it finally.*

CARL. How long will this stencil hold out?

BAUM [*singing out the answer*]. Another hundred.

ERNST. That's plenty. This particular leaflet's going to make some of our Nazi friends perspire once it gets into the workers' hands. Workers might like to know the American embargo on German goods has increased 50 per cent. in the last six months. They might like to know wages are down one-third and vital foods are up 75 per cent.

TILLY [*without looking up*]. Stop loafing, comrades.

• ERNST. She says that to a man who hasn't slept for thirty hours!

CARL. Listen, Dodo, you better take care. Just out of a sickbed, and——

ERNST. Good as new. I could swing you around my finger.

CARL. [*laughing*] Try it. [*They spar with good-nature.*

TILLY. Comrades! Stop loafing!

CARL. That's right. [*Picks up the leaflets.*] How many of these do I take?

CLIFFORD ODETS

ERNST. Two hundred. Get them to Zeltner. He'll take care of distribution.

CARL. Listen, Ernst, I hate to say it, I don't trust Zeltner. [*Tilly suddenly looks up, Baum turns his head.*]

ERNST. Why don't you trust Zeltner?

CARL. He is too damn' brave, too damn' willing to die for what he calls "the Cause," too damn' downright curious.

ERNST. In the last analysis maybe just romantic.

CARL. He wanted to know this address. Is that romantic?

ERNST. He asked?

CARL. This morning. I told him Berlin's a big city.

TILLY. Did he press the point?

CARL. No, but his knuckles went white around the pencil.

ERNST. We are prepared to move on a moment's notice. Baum's removing the machine as soon as he is finished. In the meantime deliver this package to Zeltner.

CARL. Why take a chance?

ERNST. When we see what he does with this package we'll know where we stand.

CARL [*seriously*]. I see.

BAUM. I used to be a peaceful man who planted tulips.

ERNST. Get going, Carl—the back streets.

TILLY [*not looking up*]. All comrades to be referred to by first names. Please remember to spread the word.

[*Baum sings "O Tannenbaum."*]

CARL. I don't suppose you and Tilly could come to Frieda's to hear some Bach to-night.

ERNST. With all this work?

CARL. Do you know the trio hasn't met for five months?

BAUM [*sings*]. My father hated music.

ERNST. My fingers are stiff as boards.

BAUM. The day he died a six-piece band accompanied him right to the cemetery.

ERNST. Not to have touched a violin for six months? Incredible!

CARL. See you to-morrow.

TILL THE DAY I DIE

ERNST [*stopping him*]. Wait a minute, Carl. I know what's on your mind. Every time we say good-bye we both think, "When will we meet again? . . . What will tomorrow bring? . . . Is this the last time together?"

CARL [*trying to jest*]. Look, a mind-reader.

ERNST. You must be careful, Carl.

CARL. I know how you feel.

ERNST. You've got an awful hot head. You mustn't ever lose your temper when you find yourself in a jam.

CARL [*laughing*]. Don't worry about your little brother; he is slippery as an eel.

BAUM. Did you ever eat a pickled eel?

ERNST. Be careful.

CARL. Sure. [*The brothers grip hands and look at each other.*] Know what I do? When I walk in the streets I sing. That makes them say, "He's above board; he can't be doing underground work." But they don't know I'm singing because I know where we'll be some day. When I sing—

TILLY. You sing yourself right out of here, comrade. Right this minute.

CARL [*laughing*]. *Correctamente*, as the Spaniards say. *Adios.*

ERNST. *Adios.*

TILLY. And pull the door tight.

BAUM. Don't take no wooden money. [*Exit Carl.*]

ERNST. I wouldn't like to see him in a detention camp. Emil went yesterday. [*Walks up to Baum.*] Will the rest take long?

BAUM. Yes. [*Counts deliberate turns of crank.*] One, two, three. That's the whole run. [*Stops.*]

ERNST. Good.

BAUM. Oh, I'm a fast worker.

TILLY. Learn it from your father?

BAUM [*beginning to clean and pack up machine as Ernst takes printed sheets down to table and packs them*]. My father? You should have seen him. A dead ringer for von Hindenburg. A corporal of 1870. What would happen if he lived to-day?

CLIFFORD ODETS

Some Nazi would say, "A war hero," tickle him under the arm—presto! The next day he would be wearing a brown shirt and killing workers a mile a minute. A real smoke.

ERNST. What's the time?

BAUM [*looking at watch*]. Time for supper. Seven o'clock.

ERNST. Where's Zelda?

TILLY. Said she would be here at six.

ERNST. She is usually on time. Here is the last package to go.

TILLY. I hope Zelda won't crack. She hasn't heard from Hugo for three months.

BAUM [*seriously*]. Hugo? He might be dead by now. Like the report on Schlegel yesterday. Trying to escape, they said. To fill a man's back full of lead like that.

[*Puts on a ragged coat.*]

ERNST. Take some money for your supper. [*Puts coins on table.*] This much to spare.

BAUM [*shy as a young girl*]. I don't like to take it, Ernst.

ERNST. Well, we're even—I don't like to give it. [*Indicates machine in box.*] Mark it "Glass."

BAUM. I used to be crazy on tulip bulbs. For years I spent my weekly salary on them.

TILLY. "Glass" in big letters!

BAUM [*doing so*]. Do you spell glass with one 's' or two?

ERNST. Two.

TILLY [*laughing*]. That's one your father didn't teach you.

BAUM. It's no joke. I'm getting dehydrated, that's what I am. Yep, the juices is going right outa me. [*Picks up package.*] Well, don't take no wooden money. [*Exit.*]

TILLY. I like him.

ERNST. He's a good worker. [*Suddenly shows faintness.*]

TILLY [*up and to him*]. What's the matter, Ernst?

ERNST [*sitting*]. I guess I'm tired. Maybe the body doesn't throw off disease bugs as easy as I think.

TILLY. If I say you need a month's rest you'll say, "Who does my work?" Is that right?

ERNST. Right!

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TILLY. Dammit, I'll do your work.

ERNST. Alone?

TILLY. Why not?

ERNST. Tempting, but improbable.

TILLY. You and your male chauvinism!

ERNST [*with smiling protest*]. No, Tilly, no.

TILLY. To-day I'm particularly concerned with you.

ERNST. You want to know a secret? There is something altogether lovely and birdlike about you. [*Knock on the door.*] Zelda?

TILLY [*softly*]. I'll see.

[*She goes, and for a brief moment Ernst allows his real weariness to show, but straightens up as Tilly enters with Zelda.*]

ERNST [*overbrightly*]. Late, Zelda?

ZELDA. Yes, I—I——

[*Suddenly begins to cry, head in arms on table.*]

ERNST. Dear Zelda, what happened?

TILLY [*framing name with lips*]. Hugo.

[*Ernst goes behind Zelda as if to say some comforting thing, but realizes better. Looks at Tilly and shakes his head pityingly. Zelda finally straightens up and dries her eyes.*]

ZELDA. I got the news this morning. They say he jumped out the window. Hugo would do that! They sent the body to his mother. I'll spend the night with her. Is it all right?

ERNST. Sure it is.

ZELDA. I'll deliver the leaflets first. This package? [*Ernst nods. She takes it.*] Tell the comrades to stay away from the funeral. They'll be watching.

[*Ernst embraces her, and she goes out.*]

ERNST [*in a burst*]. Hell! I'd like to go and sit in a park somewhere!

TILLY. They met in the park. She told me once. He was feeding pigeons. You I met on the subway three years ago. To-day is an anniversary for us. •

CLIFFORD ODETS

ERNST. Really?

TILLY. Zelda took the wind out of my lungs. I wanted to propose——

ERNST. Something nice?

TILLY. A walk in the park—a small supper—then we would walk home slowly, quietly. You'd let me hold your hand. . . . Poor Zelda.

ERNST. My present dream of the world—I ask for happy, laughing people everywhere. I ask for hope in eyes: for wonderful baby boys and girls I ask, growing up strong and prepared for a new world. I won't ever forget the first time we visited the nursery in Moscow. Such faces on those children! Future engineers, doctors. When I saw them I understood most deeply what the revolution meant.

TILLY. Maybe we could have one like that—a baby, I mean.

ERNST. When the day comes that we don't have to live like rats in sewers—— Did I thank you for nursing me the past three weeks?

TILLY. Not a word came out of that stingy mouth. [*He kisses her in thanks.*] Did I thank you for the birthday card?

ERNST. Not a word came out of that stingy mouth. [*She kisses him in thanks.*] Did I thank you for the woollen socks?

TILLY. Ingratitude! [*He kisses her again.*] And you, Comrade Tausig, I never thanked you just for living!

ERNST. Ahhh . . .

[*Kisses her fully this time. She finally breaks away.*]

TILLY. Stop loafing on my mouth, comrade. [*Looking at papers on table*] We have to finish this.

ERNST. Getting tough again?

TILLY. Seriously, I decoded the milk bill. There are nine names and addresses of party officials to be memorized by your most excellent brain.

ERNST. Berlin?

TILLY. Look it over. The rest of the room's as clean as a plucked chicken. Not a suspicious word.

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ERNST [*examining list*]. Who's Spitzer?

TILLY. Rosenfeld, I think.

ERNST. And Strasser?

TILLY. My brother, Hans.

ERNST. Chris' sake, when did you see him last?

TILLY. Four months ago.

ERNST. I think we—— [*A low knock on the door stops him. Both freeze into position. From now on they whisper.*] Did some one knock?

TILLY [*listening*]. Just a minute. [*Knock is louder.*]

ERNST. Don't answer. [*Tears name list in half.*] Memorize those. Quick!

VOICE [*outside*]. Open the door!

ERNST. Sisst! [*Both stand there memorizing.*]

VOICE [*as knocking increases*]. Open the door—Secret Police.

TILLY. The Gestapo!

ERNST. That bastard Zeltner! [*Saying address aloud*] 783, 783, 783 . . . [*Finally the knocking stops.*] Don't stop. [*Her lips move rapidly and silently.*] All right?

TILLY. All right.

[*But she goes on. Knocking comes again and "Secret Police." Ernst lights end of his paper. Watches her while paper burns. Finally she nods her head and he touches lighted paper to hers. Both burn down and are stamped to dust on the floor.*]

ERNST [*all in whispers*]. You and I were here on the couch. [*Puts coat and vest on back of chair.*]

TILLY. An affair?

ERNST. You're in the business. Your room. [*Points to himself.*] Your customer. Push your hair around.

TILLY. All ready. [*She does so. Musses up couch.*]

VOICE [*outside*]. Open the door! This is the Secret Police.

SLOW FADEOUT

CLIFFORD ODETS

*In the dark between this scene and the next the shrill sounds of half a dozen whistles, variously pitched, blowing with hysterical intensity.*

*This device to be carried throughout.*

SCENE II

*Office in a Nazi Brown House. A fat detective in a trench coat and brown derby at telephone on desk, which also holds typewriter. His name is Popper. Two orderlies in Nazi uniform at the side sitting on a bench. They are counting from a list. To one side of the desk stands Ernst Tausig, a prisoner.*

POPPER [*excited and angry on 'phone*]. I'm waiting for you. [*Waits, drums, fingers, spits.*] I'm waiting for you, I said. Mommer God! You think I've got all day.

ORDERLY [*begins to count aloud*]. Thirty-seven, thirty-eight, thirty-nine——

POPPER [*yelling at them*]. Dumb-bells, can't you see I'm trying to work here. Mommer God, it's full of crazy people, the whole house. Hello! The one I mean is the Communist Ernst Tausig. Find the rest of the report and bring it to me on the third floor immediately. Captain Schlegel is waiting for the report. What? No, Schlegel. S as in Samuel. [*Hastily corrects himself.*] No, I mean S as in Storm Trooper. Also you made a mistake on the first part of the report. Don't give me back-talk, dumb-bell; the report is in front of my eyes here. His girl friend was released. A plain out-and-out whore. What? No, not war, whore. [*Turns to orderly, in desperation.*] You tell him.

ORDERLY I [*immediately at 'phone*]. W-h-o-r-e.

[*Retires primly.*]

POPPER [*back at 'phone*]. We brought him in yesterday. So look in the top file right away. [*Hangs up.*] Imagine, that nobody tells me it's my fault. I'll poke my finger through his eye. Such confusion!

ORDERLY I [*sympathetically*]. Terrible.



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POPPER. The country is running over with those Red ants. Such confusion!

ORDERLY 2. Terrible!

POPPER. Take the typewriter.

ORDERLY 2. Me?

POPPER. You.

ORDERLY 2. Yes, sir. [*Comes over to desk—a peasant type.*] Where will I take it?

POPPER. What's the matter with you? To type, to type.

ORDERLY 2. I can't type.

POPPER. You can't type?

ORDERLY 2. No, sir.

POPPER. Dumb-bell!

ORDERLY 1. Terrible!

POPPER [*to Orderly 1*]. Can you type?

ORDERLY 1. No, sir.

POPPER. So shut up! Such disorder, such confusion! Every Brown House I was connected with in the past six months is like this. Mommer God, they'll say I'm inefficient; they'll kill me. [*Suddenly turning on Ernst*] You! You make trouble for Captain Schlegel and I'll—I don't know what I'll do to you. You know where you are?

ERNST. Yes.

POPPER. You know what happens in the Columbia Brown House to Communists?

ERNST. Yes.

POPPER. Why did you say you never lived in Linden Street?

ERNST. I never did.

POPPER [*to orderlies*]. Did you hear that? He said he never lived there. [*To Ernst*] Never in possession of certain illegal materials in connexion with the underground work?

ERNST. No.

POPPER [*shaking finger under Ernst's nose*]. Listen, stinker, I—— [*Controls himself, goes to behind desk.*] Write down the liar's answer. [*Writes it down himself.*] You were last employed by the Musical Instrument Company, Eberhard?

ERNST. Yes.

POPPER. Write down he was last employed by that company. [*Writes it down himself. Trooper passes through, whispers "Courage" to Ernst.*] You know we have here enough information to burn you in hell. For three weeks we watched you, you Red fox. Do you—— [*Suddenly stops as Captain Schlegel enters, followed by an orderly named Adolph. Popper continues fawningly.*] Good morning, Captain Schlegel.

SCHLEGEL [*a man like Goering*]. Is this him?

POPPER. Yes, sir, this is the one, Captain Schlegel.

SCHLEGEL. Any illegal papers found on him?

POPPER. He got rid of them before the arrest, Captain.

SCHLEGEL. Red fighter?

POPPER. Without a doubt, Captain.

SCHLEGEL. Writer?

POPPER. Former editor of a unit paper, Captain.

SCHLEGEL [*to Ernst as he examines report from desk*]. That so?

ERNST. Formerly so.

POPPER. Flat as the rug when you catch them. Otherwise burning Reichstags twice a day.

SCHLEGEL. Never mind. Where's the rest of the report?

POPPER. Begging your pardon, Captain, they can't find it downstairs.

SCHLEGEL. You'd better be careful, Popper. Such inefficiency will not be tolerated.

POPPER [*whining*]. I do the best I can, Captain.

SCHLEGEL. Never mind, never mind. [*To Ernst*] How long have you belonged to the Communist Party?

ERNST. Since 1923.

SCHLEGEL. You deny belonging to the underground party at the present time?

ERNST. I do.

SCHLEGEL. You are on friendly terms with foreigners?

ERNST. No.

SCHLEGEL. You are not familiar with certain Bulgarian incendiaries?

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ERNST. No.

SCHLEGEL. Married?

ERNST. No.

SCHLEGEL. Any children?

ERNST [*smiling*]. No.

SCHLEGEL. What's funny?

ERNST. Nothing.

SCHLEGEL [*taking Ernst by his coat lapels*]. Wipe off the smile. [*Releases Ernst and dusts off hands as if contaminated.*]  
What unit did you work with?

ERNST. Unit number twenty-fifteen.

SCHLEGEL. Who was the unit organizer?

ERNST. A man named Hess.

SCHLEGEL. Where is he now?

ERNST. I saw him last one year ago.

POPPER [*until now holding back his eagerness*]. Where does he live, huh?

[*Captain gives Popper a superior look. Popper fades apologetically.*]

SCHLEGEL. You had charge of a secret printing press on Hartsheim Street?

ERNST. No.

SCHLEGEL. You insist you did not help organize the underground Press in Berlin.

ERNST. I did not.

SCHLEGEL. No illegal leaflets?

ERNST. No.

SCHLEGEL [*goes over and takes rifle from orderly. Taps twice on floor with butt of rifle, hands it back to orderly, and returns to Ernst, at the same time taking the report up from the desk*].  
This report—all a tissue of lies you say?

ERNST. I cannot say.

[*A man enters—wears mask—limps.*]

SCHLEGEL [*turning to the man*]. What's his name?

MAN. Ernst Tausig.

SCHLEGEL. His work?

MAN. The underground Press.

SCHLEGEL. You may go, Zerrago. [*Man goes.*]

ERNST. We knew the rat as Zeltner.

SCHLEGEL [*suddenly slaps him in the face*]. Control your tongue. When you are asked you will speak concerning three matters: A, identification of prisoners; B, names; C, addresses. Until then keep quiet.

[*Turns from him, walks directly away, but suddenly turns and throws the whole sheaf of papers in Ernst's face.*]

POPPER. He thinks he's in kindergarten.

SCHLEGEL. You'll be in kindergarten if you don't keep your face shut. [*Approaches Ernst, examines him from all sides.*] I hear you're a musician of sorts.

ERNST. Yes.

SCHLEGEL. Play an instrument?

ERNST. Formerly the violin.

SCHLEGEL. Such sensitive hands. Hold them up. [*Ernst does so.*] So filthy. Put them on the desk. [*Ernst does so.*] So, a scraper of catgut. Now, what I have against the Communists is [*holding and turning Ernst's jaw in his hand*] the snout-like narrowness of their non-Nordic jaws. The nostrils display sensual and voluptuous self-indulgence; talking with the aid of hands and feet; non-Nordic characteristics.

[*Walking away from Ernst, wipes his hands on a handkerchief.*]

ADOLPH. For every S. A. man killed in Berlin, Brandenburg, three Communists will have to answer with their lives.

SCHLEGEL. A violin is an eloquent instrument. Perhaps you are familiar with Beethoven's *Opus Sixty-one*, the violin concerto. Answer yes or no.

ERNST. Yes.

SCHLEGEL. In the key of D? [*Having taken rifle from orderly's hand, he suddenly brings down the butt of it on Ernst's fingers, smashing them. Roars.*] With the Joachim cadenza? [*Ernst, writhing with pain, puts his smashed right hand under his left armpit and almost faints. Captain Schlegel now roars the*

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at times. In fact, it might be much better for both of us if you weren't so graceful with those expressive hands of yours. Flitting around here like a soulful antelope. I'm lonely; I've got no one in the whole world.

ADOLPH. You've got me, Eric.

SCHLEGEL. Hitler is lonely too. So is God.

ADOLPH. I know.

SCHLEGEL. I lost my temper and smashed him against orders.

ADOLPH. You need a rest. You're nervous.

SCHLEGEL. Say it—nervous as a woman—say it! Yes, that's the third one in a week I haven't been able to get a word out of. All I need is for them to find out about us and I am through for good. My God, you don't know who to trust.

ADOLPH. Trust me.

SCHLEGEL [*examining Adolph's face between his hands*]. You? You're as fickle as a girl. You know that song by Hugo Wolf, "I wish all your charm was painted." It's written for you and me. Last night I heard a *Lieder* concert. There weren't fifty people in the audience. The country is gripped by fear. Houses are locked by day and night.

ADOLPH. Please . . . I'm very fond of you.

SCHLEGEL. Fond? You probably carry tales. . . . I know, you love the Captain's uniform, not the man.

ADOLPH. You're hurting me.

SCHLEGEL. What does a child like you know?

ADOLPH. Please, I mean. . . . [*Suddenly begins to cry.*]

SCHLEGEL. Sisst! You'll drive me crazy. Where do you think you are? Go out and wash your face. [*Looks at papers on desk.*] Who's crazy, they or me? Saving a Communist because they think he'll spill the beans. I thought I told you to go.

ADOLPH. Please.

SCHLEGEL. Get out of here, don't you hear me? Get out!

ADOLPH. Yes, sir.

[*Hurries out.*]

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SCHLEGEL [*looks at papers, scatters them around*]. My God! My God! What's the world coming to? Where's it going? My God!

BLACKOUT

[*Whistles in the dark.*]

SCENE III

*The barracks room. Troopers playing pinochle, drinking beer. Guns and blackjacks on table. Five prisoners lined up against wall, backs to audience. Young trooper marching back and forth behind them. Peltz and Weiner, two troopers, having a hot argument downstage.*

PELTZ. I'm always for the practical side of the thing.

WEINER. Was you ever in a school, if I'm not getting too personal?

PELTZ. I went to school.

WEINER. Where, if I'm not getting too personal?

PELTZ. Right here in Berlin. We learned all that stuff in school—Napoleon an' all that stuff—but it didn't help in business. Adages an' all that. They're for the idlers. When I was in business we didn't talk about Napoleon. We talked about how much.

WEINER. You are absolutely without doubt the most ignorant man I ever met.

PELTZ. I know, I know, we just don't agree.

WEINER. What made von Hindenburg a great general?

PELTZ. There was other great generals besides him.

WEINER. There never was a greater one.

PELTZ. How about the few others who was great? Don't you know every generation must have its magnet? You don't see that!

WEINER. What's the use of arguing. It's like religion. Some say——

PELTZ. You got that student stuff, artistic. Me, I'm more for the practical side. But you are a good scholar. Yes, I

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can see that, Weiner. Was you always that way—more on the student side?

WEINER. What? What the hell are you talking about?

PELTZ. Now you know——

WEINER. You're so dumb!

*[Walks away. Peltz shrugs his shoulders, goes back to newspaper.]*

YOUNG TROOPER *[to elderly man]*. Can't you stand still when you're told to stand still! *[Kicks him strongly; man falls; trooper picks him up.]* You weren't too old to be a Social-Democrat, were you!

*[Shoves him back in line. Another trooper brings in two more prisoners—one feebly attempts a Nazi salute, says, "Heil Hitler," but is shoved in line.]*

TROOPER 1 *[at table]*. The bastards think they'll save their skin like that!

*[Trooper 2 squirts beer from mouth at prisoner.]*

YOUNG TROOPER. The old one wanted a good day's rest on the floor.

TROOPER 2. Which one? *[Goes to him with bottle.]*

YOUNG TROOPER. This one.

*[Trooper 2 fills mouth with beer, squirts it in old man's face. All roar with laughter.]*

TROOPER 1 *[coming over]*. Dammit! I know this one. You know where you are?

BOY. Yes, sir.

TROOPER 1 *[points to boy]*. You was here before, wasn't you?

BOY. Yes, sir.

TROOPER 1. What was you arrested for that time?

BOY. I was accused of distributing pamphlets.

TROOPER 1. And what now?

TROOPER 5. Riding on a truck-load of illegal literature.

TROOPER 1. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!

BOY. He came up to me—the man. I was standing on

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the corner and he offered me five marks to help drive the load.

TROOPER 2. You didn't know what was in the boxes?

BOY. No; he didn't tell me that, and I didn't ask questions.

TROOPER 1. This little one is telling fairy-tales.

BOY. I was glad to earn the five marks.

TROOPER 3 [*at the table*]. What did you do it for? They won't believe you now.

BOY. I didn't work since I left school. The labour camps won't accept me because I'm a Communist. What can I do?

TROOPER 1. What can you do? Eat floor-wax! [*Hits him; the boy falls.*] Good appetite!

TROOPER 3 [*coming forward*]. Leave the boy alone, Max!

TROOPER 5. Look at these remarks. [*Reads from pamphlet:*] "The Brutal Slaughter of Red Front Comrades by Hitler's Brown Murder Hordes——"

TROOPER 1. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!

[*Kicks the fallen boy.*]

TROOPER 3. Leave the boy alone, Max. [*Sorry for him.*]

TROOPER 1. I'll leave him alone!

TROOPER 4 [*still at the table with handful of cards*]. If you're playing cards, play.

TROOPER 3. Play cards, Max!

TROOPER 1. All right, Professor.

[*The game begins, and presently Popper walks in with Ernst.*]

POPPER. Over there. [*Ernst goes into line. Popper watches fallen boy get up into line.*] What happened with him?

TROOPER 3. The thunderbolt made a visit.

[*Indicates Trooper 1.*]

TROOPER 1 [*jumping up*]. You are just too damn' smart, Hassel!

POPPER. Silence!

[*Popper goes to them, whispers. They nod heads as they furtively look Ernst over. Popper says "Don't forget" and goes out. Trooper 2 marches around*]



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*Ernst and examines him insolently. Goes back to seat and says to others :*

TROOPER 2. Not a blemish on the lily!

TROOPER 4. Are we playing cards or not?

TROOPER 1. I will say three fifty in spades.

TROOPER 2. You pay double if you lose.

TROOPER 1. Don't put no evil eye on me, Hassel!

TROOPER 2. Don't you act so mean, Herr Thunderbolt!

TROOPER 1. You wanna make something of it?

TROOPER 2. To me you can't talk like to your snotnose friends!

TROOPER 1. You must think——

TROOPER 3. Boys! Is this the trust the Leader puts in you—to start fights in the barracks with Jews and Bolsheviks watching you.

TROOPER 2. That's right!

TROOPER 4. Heil Hitler!

*[All salute as if toasting, and all sit. Card improvisation. Weiner edges his way over to Peltz.]*

WEINER. What kind of education can you get from the newspapers?

PELTZ. I see how it is. You like to lay around in those *cafés* with all the Bohemians. See them lying around with frocks on—dreamers. They can't come to the front—just dreamers.

WEINER. Did you read what Thyssen said?

PELTZ. A big man, a big man.

WEINER. Success is 90 per cent. luck, 5 per cent. work, he said.

PELTZ. Exactly, exactly, an' don't any intelligent man say the same? The same thing, he says, the same.

WEINER. What?

PELTZ. That means something, don't it?

*[Improvisation on pinochle game goes on in loud voices. The old man who has been swaying now falls again. The young trooper, looking over a shoulder at the game, finally turns and sees the fallen man.]*

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YOUNG TROOPER. Look at him—can't stand no more.  
[Examines him.] He's bleeding from the mouth.

TROOPER 3. Take him to the hospital. My trick.

TROOPER 1. He's been standing seven hours.

OLD MAN. Don't hit me—please don't hit me.

YOUNG TROOPER. No, just dusting you off.

[Hits hard.

OLD MAN. Please don't hit me. I was in the War. I was decorated for bravery. Von Mackensen decorated me for merit.

YOUNG TROOPER. General von Mackensen.

OLD MAN. I swear. Don't hit me again. I swear I—yes, I was—— [Now laughs and goes very hysterical.] Please . . . please . . .

[The Thunderbolt runs over—hits the old man, who crumples silently.

TROOPER 1. These Social-Democrats is a noisy bunch.  
[Has retained hand of cards. Starts back to table, and on way says "The ace of diamonds," puts it on table, says to the young trooper:] Court-plaster on his head, Fritz!

[The young trooper drags the old man out like a sack of sanddust.

TROOPER 4 [as they play cards]. Your muscle's better than his.

TROOPER 1. Whose?

TROOPER 4. Tauchner in 120. He bets anything he can knock a man out in one blow—nine out of ten. Why, yesterday he won fifteen marks and a smoking pipe.

• TROOPER 2. That's scientific. Just how you hit them . . . like tearing telephone books.

TROOPER 1. I guess you can do it too!

TROOPER 2. If I want . . .

TROOPER 1. Only you don't want?

TROOPER 2. Maybe I'll show you, and maybe I won't.

TROOPER 1. How about a bet—the pack of cards against my belt?

TROOPER 2. With the silver buckle?

[A scream heard from below.

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TROOPER 1. Yeah.

TROOPER 2. You go first.

TROOPER 1. Then you go, and if I don't do it you go again.

TROOPER 2. That's right.

TROOPER 4. Hand over the bets. [*They do so.*] Try the one Popper brought in. He's the biggest and freshest. [*Calls to Ernst:*] Hey, blackhead! Fall out of line! [*Pulls him out by coat-tail.*] Stand there, pig.

[*Ernst stands in place. Trooper 3 stays at table. The others approach.*]

TROOPER 2. Who takes this one?

TROOPER 1. You're his size. I'll take that boy. Hey! [*Pulls out boy.*]

TROOPER 4. I count three. You both hit together. Ready.

TROOPER 2 [*preparing for blow with the other*]. Yes, ready . . .

TROOPER 4. Gentlemen—one . . . [*Trooper 1 spits on his fist.*]

TROOPER 2 [*stands motionless*]. Remember, only in the head!

TROOPER 4. Gentlemen—two!

BOY [*covering face*]. No.

TROOPER 1. Put your hands down, stinker! [*Boy refuses.*]  
Put them down, bastard! [*Boy does so.*]

TROOPER 4. Gentlemen—two and a half . . .

TROOPER 2. Just a minute.

TROOPER 1. What's the matter?

TROOPER 2. Yours is half fainting—a pushover—

TROOPER 1. Well, I'll take him. You!

[*Pulls another out—pushes boy, who falls sitting and cries monotonously.*]

TROOPER 4. Now—one—two—three—!

[*Both men let blows fly. The victim of No. 1 goes down in a heap. Ernst stands stunned. In disgust Trooper 2 goes back to seat.*]

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TROOPER 1 [*delighted*]. Well, who is the big scientist now?

TROOPER 2. That was a pushover.

TROOPER 4. Max won the bet.

[*Hands over the prizes to Trooper 1.*]

TROOPER 1. You wasn't so smart.

[*Suddenly Trooper 2 in a fury lets fly at Ernst, who slowly crumples to his knees.*]

TROOPER 2. Get back in the line, you louse!

[*Stalks back to table and sits moodily with chin on fist. Ernst slowly crawls back into line and rises painfully.*]

TROOPER 3. Fritz, get a bucket of water for the kid.

[*He laughs triumphantly.*]

TROOPER 1. Ha, ha, Professor!

[*Laughs. Peltz and Weiner have been arguing throughout this last scene.*]

PELTZ. Oh, there's no question, no question. Then what's the use of cursing the world and blaming it on a handful of rich men?

WEINER [*disgusted completely*]. I'm not cursing the world!

PELTZ. Now you was pretty strong there. Tell the truth, wasn't you, Weiner?

WEINER. All I said was——

PELTZ. I don't care what this one or that one says about the rich men. It really don't interest me. Or taxes or socialism. I don't listen to them artists. But just because there's a depression I wouldn't say, "Oh, the goddamn rich men."

WEINER. I didn't say the goddamn rich men.

PELTZ. Absolutely, absolutely . . .

WEINER. My God, you're dumb! If I'm not getting too personal.

PELTZ. I know, Weiner, I know. Naturally people ain't of the same temper-a-ment. Naturally . . . the practical side—like Herr Dr Goebbels says here in the paper. [*Reads:*] "The head of a prominent Jew must be displayed on every

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telegraph-pole from Munich to Berlin." No dreamy stuff, Weiner. That's practical. . . .

[A scream heard from below.

FADEOUT

SCENE IV

*The same as Scene II. Nazi swastika flag as background. Orderlies 1 and 2 rediscovered, respectively Edsel and Martin.*

EDSEL. "What's the world comin' to?" he says to poppa. Poppa began cryin'. My uncle said, "Don't cry, 'cause it won't help nothin'." After all, he didn't work for three years.

MARTIN. The Leader has promised a job to every German.

EDSEL. Don't you think I said that? "Read the papers," I told him. "Plenty of work in Munich." So he laughs, and says that he just came from Munich and not a job to be had there. But their papers say plenty of jobs in Berlin.

MARTIN. That sounds to me like Red propaganda. Why didn't you arrest him?

EDSEL. My own uncle?

MARTIN. He told a lie, didn't he?

EDSEL. I don't know.

MARTIN. The Leader says there's jobs for every one.

EDSEL. I know. . . .

MARTIN. Government work on the roads.

EDSEL. Two and a half marks a week. Can a mouse live on it?

MARTIN. Is that a nice thing to say?

EDSEL. Well, can a mouse live on it?

MARTIN. I don't know. Dr Goebbels spoke on the radio last night. He says we must be prepared for a war with them any day.

EDSEL. Momma said some Jews was very nice people.

MARTIN [*jumps up and goes away*]. Say, you better be care-

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ful—saying things like that. I don't wanna even know you.

EDSEL. Oh, she says it. Of course, I don't agree.

MARTIN. You better be careful. They're hot as hornets around here to-day. This morning they found the zoological garden plastered with Red propaganda. They can't find out who done it. They cleaned them all away on one side, and when they turned around it was all plastered upon the other side.

EDSEL. They will lose their heads, all them Communists.

MARTIN. Of course. . . .

EDSEL. If they catch them.

MARTIN. The Major brought in some of the leaflets for examination. Right there on the desk.

*[Edsel backs away from desk as if stung.]*

EDSEL. Those things there?

MARTIN. The tissue-paper—they print it on tissue-paper so the wind blows them all over. A certain lady on Friedrichstrasse, one flew right on her face, and when she seen what it was she fainted dead away.

EDSEL *[craning his neck for a look at the desk]*. Can you see what they say? Read what it says.

MARTIN. Say, read it yourself.

EDSEL. You're closer to the desk than me.

MARTIN *[they are whispering now]*. It don't prove nothing 'cause I'm closer to the desk. *[Slowly edges over. Looks around. Finally whispers:]* "Workers of Germany!"

*[Springs away, amazed at his own audacity.]*

EDSEL *[whispering]*. What?

MARTIN. That's what it says. . . .

EDSEL *[both whispering]*. Read some more, Martin. Shh.

*[Tiptoes to right side and watches out.]*

MARTIN *[looks round and tiptoes to desk. Picks up slip nervously, clears throat, reads]*. "The Krupp armament works ran at a loss until Hitler came into power. Now it announces a 6 per cent. dividend——" *[Breaks off nervously.]* Watch out, Edsel.

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EDSEL. I'm watching. *[Looks off left.]*

MARTIN *[looks left, continues nervously, in a whisper.]*  
"While five and a half million workers are unemployed,  
which, with their families, constitutes one-third of the Ger-  
man working class, increased military forces are the basis of  
the Hitler economic . . ."

*[Paper drops out of his nervous hands.]*

EDSEL. Pick it up.

MARTIN. I can't.

EDSEL *[comes over]*. What are you so nervous for?

MARTIN *[chattering]*. Who's nervous?

EDSEL *[himself shaking]*. You're sweating.

MARTIN. It's a hot day.

EDSEL. Stand at the door. *[Martin does so. Edsel looks round, then picks up paper; reads:]* "In the meantime there is  
no bread, no milk. The Hitler-controlled newspapers print  
lies. The——"

MARTIN *[suddenly panic-stricken]*. The Major!

*[Edsel runs round, not knowing where to put the slip.  
Tries to find a place. Suddenly puts it in his  
mouth and chews violently. As Major Duhring  
enters ceases chewing and with Martin comes  
rigidly to attention. Major walks in, notices Edsel.]*

MAJOR. What's wrong?

MARTIN. Beg pardon, sir?

MAJOR *[pointing to Edsel, who has a mouthful]*. You!  
*[Waits.]* Can't talk? *[Edsel finally swallows strongly.]*

EDSEL. Yes, sir?

MAJOR. Why are you men loafing around here?

EDSEL. Beg pardon, sir, we were assigned to this room.

MAJOR. What room?

EDSEL. To the examination room.

MAJOR. Now, boys, does this look like an examination  
room? Clear out before I lose my temper. *[They scramble  
out with heels clicking and salutes.]* All right, all right, get out.  
*[Laughs when they exit, a tired, civilized man. Calls one back.]*  
You!

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MARTIN [*badly scared*]. Yes, sir, this is not the examination room.

MAJOR. Here, don't stand there like a whipped dog. I'm not calling you down. Inform them on the floor below to send up the Communist Ernst Tausig.

BOTH [*bowing and scraping*]. Yes, sir.

[*Try to get out of door together, with comic mix-up; finally out.*]

MAJOR [*shakes head with pity*]. Hmmm. . . . [*Picks up Red leaflet.*] "Workers of Germany . . ." [*Puts down slip, shakes his head again. Goes up to Nazi insignia, examines it reflectively with bitterness. Ernst is brought in. His back still turned, says to orderly:*] Leave us alone. [*Orderly clicks heels, salutes. Major, with back turned*] Sit down, Tausig.

[*Ernst, wearied, mistrustful, does not move. Major slowly turns, handkerchief at lower portion of face.*]

MAJOR. What? Another whipped and frightened dog? You may be seated. . . . [*Ernst looks at him a long time, and finally sits.*] Cigarette? . . . [*Ernst takes one, Major putting it in his mouth and lighting it. Waits to see what Major has up his sleeve.*] You look different, Tausig, than when I saw you last—a meeting—in Charlottenburg.

ERNST. I remember you—Duhring.

MAJOR. What happened to your hand?

ERNST. What happened to your 'social ideals'?

MAJOR. Why I am in a Nazi uniform happens to be unimportant. A realistic necessity. I am married into one of the finest old German families. Nordic from the year one. The work I do for the National Socialists harms no foe of the Nazi state; in fact, I am inclined to believe that if the truth were known my work may often be interpreted as a positive hindrance. [*Laughs, and then adds soberly:*] Not for publication. Perhaps I don't care. . . . That's nearer the truth. I will not deny the justness of the scorn in your eyes. This may cost me my head. . . . I'm not sure I care. [*Turns around room and comes back.*] I want to warn you. . . . They'll get what they want out of you. Trust me to——



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ERNST [*bitterly*]. A man tortured by his conscience?

MAJOR. Call it what you will. Here they use—  
[*Voices heard without. Major harshly, tearing cigarette from Ernst's mouth*] Stand up! When these three questions are answered—  
[*Breaks off to greet a blonde woman escorted by Captain Schlegel.*] Good afternoon, dear.

HEDVIG [*his wife, vacuous but energetic*]. Ruppert, the handsome Captain showed me the way. I had to ask your advice about an important matter.

MAJOR [*ironically to Captain*]. Thank you, Captain.

SCHLEGEL [*with ironic courtesy himself*]. You're welcome, Major. Your wife and I chatted pleasantly for ten minutes on the lower floor before I realized her identity.

HEDVIG. Yes, the place is full of nasty-mannered men. They kept me waiting ten minutes. [*Suddenly aware of Ernst.*] Who is this?

MAJOR [*with ironic intent*]. A Communist, Hedvig. . . .

HEDVIG [*shrinking away to other side of desk, now protected by Captain*]. Oh!

MAJOR [*smiling in spite of himself*]. They don't bite.

SCHLEGEL. Only in the dark.

HEDVIG. Such dirty beasts. Don't they ever wash?

MAJOR. When they have the facilities.

HEDVIG. And these were the ones who were supposed to be masters of the coming new world. [*Slaps him with glove. Ernst stands unflinchingly. She drops her glove. Captain picks it up and proffers it to her.*] Oh, no, I couldn't wear it again.  
[*Captain puts it on desk. Major takes it up.*]

MAJOR [*ironic*]. They're expensive gloves. What was on your mind, Hedvig?

HEDVIG. About my broadcast speech.

[*Takes it from purse.*]

MAJOR. Did you write it yourself, Hedvig?

HEDVIG. No, Poppa's secretary wrote it, but of course I believe every word of it myself, so it's the same thing, isn't it?

MAJOR [*with ironic seriousness*]. I should think so, Hedvig.

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HEDVIG. I wanted you to hear it before I broadcasted. I don't have to tell you that at least half a million German housewives—

MAJOR. Will put down their housework to listen to Hedvig von Barbossa explain their reason for existence.

HEDVIG. Oh, you! Always anticipating my next word!

MAJOR. A perfect husband. Don't you think so, Captain Schlegel?

CAPTAIN [*ironic*. *A constant fight goes on between the two men*]. By all means.

MAJOR. Hedvig, we are having a very heavy day here.

SCHLEGEL [*ironic*]. Oh, very heavy.

[*Major gives him a penetrating look—a slight duel goes on between their eyes.*]

MAJOR. So I must ask you to merely give me the gist of the speech, dear. Suppose we say merely the summation.

HEDVIG. Oh, you! You just aren't interested in my intellectual development.

SCHLEGEL [*ironic*]. Your husband is really the busiest officer in our section.

MAJOR. That answers you, my dear. So merely the gist.

HEDVIG. Well . . . I thought I would conclude as follows. [*Reads speech.*] "Women must understand their part in this moral renaissance of the German people. Well has it been said by our great Leader, 'In eternal warfare mankind will become great. In eternal peace mankind would be ruined.' Yes, my dear friends, war alone puts the stamp of greatness on a people! Let women tend the home! Let women breed warriors! Let women forget the pursuit of culture! Germany must expand! Germany must push her frontiers east and west! Women of Germany, give your lives for this cause!" Is that all right, Ruppert?

MAJOR. Splendid—the whole theory of the Fascist state in a paragraph. You might be one of our leading theoreticians one of these days.

HEDVIG. I told Poppa's secretary what to write—I truly did.

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MAJOR. Yes, now you must run along, Hedvig. Leave us to our work. Good-bye.

HEDVIG. And remember dinner at the Hauptmanns' to-night.

MAJOR. I won't forget. Captain, please see my wife safely out.

SCHLEGEL. Yes, sir. [Goes with her.]

MAJOR [to Ernst]. You see the sort of convenient marriages one can sometimes be forced to make.

ERNST. The Captain is not your friend.

MAJOR. Nor yours. *[Indicating wife's glove in his hand]* The Captain suspects me of leniency to prisoners. My lineage. *[In a sudden emotional outburst]* I tell you a civilized human can't stand it! A great sermon requiem is being played. It's a nightmare! *[Gets himself in control.]* He holds his knowledge over my head like a sword—the Captain, I mean. In turn I have collected certain data concerning the Captain's private life and loves—enough to have him purged to a bloodstain on the wall! We will duel ourselves to death, we two! This amuses you?

ERNST. Yes.

MAJOR. I can understand. Briefly, here is some information. *[Businesslike now]* You can take it or leave it, Tausig. Our side wants information from you. Addresses and names of party officials.

ERNST. Don't have them!

MAJOR. I'm not asking. They're sure you can identify prisoners. They mean to make you do it. You've been here three weeks. Until now they've been comparatively mild. They'll beat you to within an inch of death. You won't want to live. Then they'll nurse you back to health. This will happen several times.

ERNST. I will remember my proletarian task.

MAJOR. It's possible you may forget your proletarian task. Don't smile. A man's made of flesh and bone. They'll inform your comrades through subversive means that you've turned stool-pigeon. Before you know it

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your own unit papers will be passing the word along. In a few months—no friends. No home.<sup>1</sup> Only the new clothes and money in the pocket this side will furnish to keep up the fraud. You still smile? But suppose they put you next to the driver when they make raids? Suppose you are stood outside the courtroom where your comrades will be tried for treason? Will they understand the truth of your position? That's right—screw up your face. . . .

ERNST. My hand hurts.

MAJOR. Get medical attention on the way out. I'll sign an order.

ERNST. On the way out?

MAJOR. On the way out! That's the first step. We're releasing you. You're expected to make contacts with other party members. You'll be followed every minute of the day and night. If you don't prove valuable [*hands over signed medical order*] back you come . . . and then begins the breaking-down process. [*Stops.*] Listen, take my advice. There is an easier way out. . . .

ERNST. What is that?

MAJOR. Shoot yourself. There is peace and quiet in the grave. [*Quotes:*] "So I returned and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun . . . wherefore I praised the dead." [*Schlegel enters.*]

SCHLEGEL. The compliments of General Goering and staff, who will pay us a visit this afternoon.

MAJOR [*wary*]. Very good. You saw my wife safely to the door?

SCHLEGEL. To her car.

MAJOR. Very good.

SCHLEGEL. Our prisoner displays a most fraternal attitude. [*Nods towards seated Ernst.*]

MAJOR. Judging from the success of the prisoner's political party in distributing illegal literature, it might be well to fraternize with them in order to learn the secrets of that success.

CLIFFORD ODETS

SCHLEGEL. I resent such remarks before a prisoner.  
Stand up, you! *[Ernst stands.]*

MAJOR. With both of us in one room I give orders.  
Remain seated. *[Ernst sits.]*

SCHLEGEL. Major, I regret to inform you as house captain that it is my duty to make various reports concerning——

MAJOR *[furious]*. Silence!

SCHLEGEL. Aside from your shoulder straps I am——

MAJOR. Goddamit! Silence!

SCHLEGEL *[turns and walks to door, white with inner rage. Stops, turns]*. Jew!

MAJOR. What?

SCHLEGEL. You didn't think I knew that?

MAJOR. Come here. *[Other slowly approaches.]*

SCHLEGEL *[coolly]*. What's on your mind?

*[They look at each other eye to eye.]*

MAJOR *[finally]*. What do you mean?

SCHLEGEL. Does your wife know that?

MAJOR. Know what?

SCHLEGEL. Obviously staff headquarters has never made a close examination of the Duhring family tree.

MAJOR. If I hear one more word out of your mouth——

*[Catches and twists his tunic.]*

SCHLEGEL. You'll do that?

MAJOR. With my own hands.

SCHLEGEL *[with smiling insolence]*. By gun or sword?  
Here is one of thirty-eight calibre. *[Insolently hands over gun from his own holster.]* The first instinct of the Jew is to run.

*[At this close range the Major suddenly pulls the trigger. The Captain gets the whole automatic charge in the belly. Grabs himself with both hands. Slowly crumples in a soft pile. Gets to desk—falls behind it. The Major finally speaks in a soft voice.]*

MAJOR. I didn't want to do it. He asked for it——

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[*Adolph runs in.*] Wait outside. You will escort this prisoner to the street when he leaves the room.

ADOLPH [*seeing body*]. Very good. *Exits smartly.*

ERNST [*finally*]. You're in trouble.

MAJOR. It need not concern you. [*Eyes still on body*] One thing: see your girl if you like. She reported as a prostitute, not a party worker—which she is.

ERNST. You're mistaken.

MAJOR. I'm telling you! Not asking! See her—it's all right, she won't be molested. And for God's sake give some good girl a kiss for me. I am so slimed over with rottenness. . . . "Red Front" I can't say to you. . . . But "United Front"—I say that. In every capitalist country in the world this day let them work for the united front.

ERNST. I know.

MAJOR. Have the hand fixed. You have the pass. Good luck. . . . Just a second—cigarettes [*gives pack*]. Say I am not despised. Please say it.

ERNST. No—really, you are not despised.

MAJOR. You are talking to a dying man.

ERNST. With so much work to do?

MAJOR. I did the work—like an embezzling bank teller—I destroyed three files of valuable information against your comrades this morning. With this murder on my hands what is to be expected. You see, the contradictions of my own nature have backed up on me. Get out!

ERNST. Thanks.

[*He slowly goes. Major stands there. Looks at dead body. Goes back to desk. Sits jauntily on it. Whistles a snatch. Examines and twirls his own gun, thinks about and touches various vulnerable spots of his physiognomy, finally concentrates on one spot, places handkerchief over gun hand—stops. Suddenly puts gun on desk, looks at uniform, removes coat or Nazi arm-band. Tears flag off wall. . . . Picks up gun—puts muzzle in mouth.*]

CLIFFORD ODETS

[*Simultaneously with blackout there is a shot fired.  
Whistles in the dark.*]

SCENE V

*In the dark under the whistles we pick up on radio music, full and classical. With the lights fading up we see Tilly's small room. A rough cot. One window looking out on a world of clear light. A small bureau, wash-basin and pitcher of water on it. A door. Tilly in an old bathrobe. Music coming from her little radio. Tilly dips a corner of a towel in the water, slowly wipes her face clean with it. She finishes. Turns down cot covers. Goes to window, raises shade—blue night light comes in. She turns down lamp. Turns off radio, but puts it on again. Sits on bed, and just as she bends to remove slippers there is a tap on her door. She stays in her bent position for a second; finally, when a second knock comes, she slithers to the door. Listens. The knock again.*

TILLY [*in a faint whisper*]. Who is it?

VOICE. Ernst. . . .

[*Tilly does not believe it. Comes to centre of room. Listens, looks round, finally in a full impulse goes to door. Throws it open. Ernst is there. She is away from door. He slowly comes in, closes door, stands against it. For a long time they look at each other silently. Finally:*

TILLY. Ernst!

ERNST. Tilly!

[*They are in each other's arms.*]

TILLY. Alive!

ERNST. Alive!

TILLY. Please, sit here on the bed. [*She escorts him to the bed. He sits. She lowers shade. Turns on lamps. Turns and looks at him; is shocked by his appearance.*] Dear . . . [*She throws herself at his feet, on her knees, holds him as a mother might do a child.*] You're hurt. . . .

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ERNST. Not as much as I might be. Only my back is raw . . . the shirt is stuck to it.

TILLY. Here, I'll fix it.

[Goes to wet towel.]

ERNST. No, darling, if you touch me there I'll faint.

TILLY. Are you hungry?

ERNST. No, dear, no. Here, some one gave me cigarettes. We'll smoke and talk. Don't be excited. I want news. Here—

[They light cigarettes. She gets a little ash-tray. They sit together on cot.]

TILLY. News, what news? You've been released.

ERNST. They held me in the Columbia House since the arrest. I counted the days when I could remember—twenty-two. . . .

TILLY. Twenty-three, Ernst.

ERNST. You counted too?

TILLY. What then?

ERNST. You don't know what happens; you don't know. No one knows until he walks through that hell. . . .

TILLY. Why have they released you?

ERNST. I am being followed. I'm expected to make party contacts. Don't look out the window. Two of them in the grocery doorway. . . . I couldn't give them the slip. Maybe I shouldn't have come.

TILLY. A man must have some place.

ERNST. It won't harm. We fooled them about your identity. Where's Carl?

• TILLY. Safe at work in the suburbs.

ERNST. Good.

TILLY. Were you afraid there?

ERNST. A man who knows that the world contains millions of brothers and sisters can't be afraid. Don't think I haven't screamed with pain—they have ways of arousing every corpuscle to pain—but you keep your mouth shut.

TILLY. Your hand. . . .

ERNST [wincing]. Don't touch it. [Gets up. Walks away.]



CLIFFORD ODETS

TILLY. Sit down again. Don't be afraid of softness, of sorrow. . . .

ERNST [*holds back his emotional impulse to cry on her shoulder. Finally*]. What news of the others?

TILLY. Raff is dead.

ERNST [*deeply touched*]. How?

TILLY. The report they gave out was that he jumped from a window. And Hans Mathieson. . . .

ERNST. The same?

TILLY. The same.

ERNST. Those brave fighters. . . .

TILLY. I'm glad you're living, Ernst.

ERNST [*suddenly crying out in protest*]. Tilly, I must tell you. Tilly, for a week I have been chewing my heart to pieces. All the time I was in the Brown House they were offering me bribes, any inducements to turn informer. First a session of endearment. Then a session of torture. The human body is a tower of strength. After a while comes numbness, but the mind begins to wander. I'm afraid, Tilly—do you hear that, afraid! Something might happen. There is no rest, no possible contact with party members permitted. They will seize me again, return me to the same programme. I'm afraid of what might happen. I ask for one hour of peace.

TILLY. Peace in this war?

ERNST. Yes, peace! In the cell there—I know I stayed alive because I knew my comrades were with me in the same pain and chaos. Yes, I know that till the day I die there is no peace for an honest worker in the whole world.

TILLY. Till the day we die there is steady work to do. Let us hope we will both live to see strange and wonderful things. Perhaps we will die before then. Our children will see it then. Ours!

ERNST [*bitterly*]. Our children!

TILLY. I'm going to have a baby, Ernst. . . .

ERNST. Who is?

TILLY. I am.

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ERNST. You mean it?

TILLY. Your baby.

*[Dawn—when even the tea-kettle sings from happiness.*

ERNST *[finally, after looking at her and not knowing what to say]*. Please allow me to change the subject. . . . Overgaard, I met him three streets away from here. I made signals with my eyes. He understood. Passed by like a stranger. *[Finally]* A baby?

TILLY. Yes.

ERNST *[walks to window]*. It's almost morning. . . .

TILLY *[joining him]*. Ernst, the tenderness I feel for you . . . I don't know how to say . . . Part of my deepest life came back to me when you walked in the door here. You keep coming up in my eyes like the sense of tears. . . .

ERNST. I understand.

TILLY. It is true our work comes before our personal happiness. But we must try to wrest some joy from life.

ERNST. How can that be when presently I shall be a decoy to trap other wild ducks?

TILLY. We'll manage. Escape is possible one way or another. Now I want you to undress and sleep.

ERNST. Sleep?

TILLY. Under the warm blankets.

ERNST. Sleep in your little bed? My sister, comrade . . . my wife. . . .

*[Sits on bed. She takes off his shoes, his coat. He winces as he stretches out.*

TILLY. It hurts?

ERNST. Yes.

TILLY. To-morrow we'll fix all these things. Sleep, Ernst, sleep. To-morrow you can read the full report on the united front. *L'Humanité* came through, several copies.

ERNST *[suddenly sitting up]*. What united front?

TILLY. The united front in France.

ERNST. It has happened?

TILLY. I thought you knew?

CLIFFORD ODETS

ERNST. In France they have joined to make a solid front against the Fascists?

TILLY. Please don't get so excited, Ernst.

*[Tries to calm him.]*

ERNST. Our work is bearing fruit. In that beautiful classic country. The united front? Oh, Tilly, oh, Tilly!

*[And suddenly he is crying in the pillow for all his pains and for the joy of this news. Tilly soothes him with understanding.]*

TILLY. Yes, cry, cry. . . . *[She strokes him until the sobs become more quiet. Suddenly there is a knock on the door. Tilly whispers:]* Quiet! You're sleeping. Don't move. *[He lies still. She stealthily goes to the door.]* Who is it?

VOICE *[also whispering]*. Open the door. . . .

TILLY. Who is it?

VOICE. Carl!

*[Tilly looks around at Ernst, who raises himself on his hands. Tilly quickly opens the door, admits Carl, quickly closes door.]*

TILLY. You're spotted! Get out quick!

CARL. Where?

TILLY. They must be right behind you. Watching the house.

*[Carl quickly goes over to the cot, touches Ernst. Starts for door again, where Tilly has been listening.]*

TILLY. They're coming! *[Suddenly, in a loud voice which Carl immediately takes up]* I'm telling you to get out. What's the matter—can't a respectable girl entertain her boy friend?

CARL. You made a date with me. *[Simulates a drunkard.]*

TILLY. You're a liar. Now get out before I call the police.

CARL. Didn't you say it! In the Park didn't you tell me to come to-night? Why, for two marks—

*[Door is pushed open: two detectives in trench-coats stand there.]*

TILLY. My God! What's this, more customers?

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DICK I. Who's this?

TILLY. A fresh guy who pushed his way in. There's my boy friend, dead tired on the bed, fresh from the jug, and this garbage-can won't let him rest.

CARL. Never mind that stuff! When I met her in the Kunsterplatz Tuesday she tells me to come up to-night. "I love you," she tells me.

TILLY. Yah, yah, yah!

DICK [*comes in and looks around. Assistant blocks the door*]. Is this your boy friend?

TILLY. Yeah. He's dead tired. He was——

DICK. All right, all right! [*To Carl*] What do you wanna start up with this alley cat for? You know they do it for anyone.

CARL. Sure. . . . But the next time I meet you in that same place at lunch time——

TILLY. Yah, yah, yah, yah! . . . Thanks, officer—a real man!

[*Dick pushes out protesting Carl and looks superciliously at Tilly as he closes door. Tilly stands in her place for a second, listens, then turns down to Ernst.*]

ERNST. Did he get away?

TILLY. They believed every word. [*Suddenly door pushed open. Dick stands there again.*] What do you want? . . .

DICK [*advancing into room. Finally*]. I forgot my glove, cutie. [*Picks it up from table, goes back to door.*] You wanna be careful. Better girls than you are in the gaols.

TILLY. All right.

DICK. Lemme know if anyone makes trouble. . . .

TILLY. All right.

DICK. Or if you're lonely some night.

TILLY. All right.

DICK [*winking. Taps his chest*]. A real man, me. . . .

TILLY [*first locking door*]. Sleep, Ernst, sleep. . . .

[*But he is already asleep. She sits herself in window*]

CLIFFORD ODETS

*light in profile, as daylight comes fuller in the window.*

BLACKOUT

*Whistles*

SCENE VI

COMRADES' SCENE

*About a dozen party members seated in a small locked room. The secretary of the unit is finishing a report. Carl sits downstage with back to audience. Tilly is there. Also little Baum of the first scene. Sitting with a woman holding his hand is a man with a fine-looking head, a famous theoretician, a shawl over his shoulders, grey-haired—Stieglitz. Guard at door.*

SECRETARY [*reading*]. Three new theatre-of-action groups have been formed in the last week. They are now functioning regularly throughout the city. Three thousand cheap jazz records have been distributed since the 10th. These each end in one of our speeches. Since the first— [*Stops to admonish a small man named Julius, who is wending his way through some seated comrades.*] Will the comrades kindly remain seated until the reports are concluded.

JULIUS [*who is revealed to be wearing only one shoe*]. I left my shoe in the corner. My foot is cold.

SECRETARY [*continues*]. Since the first we have spent on Hitler joke-books and leaflets the sum of two hundred and ten marks. [*Puts down report.*] I suggest that since we are all agreed on the accuracy of the report we do not waste time, but go ahead to other business. Will some one ask the question?

VARIOUS. The question, etc.

SECRETARY. All in favour will please assent in the usual manner.

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ARNO. Just a minute. This seems to me to be in a way like a little steam-rolling.

SECRETARY. Does the comrade have any suggestions in reference—

ARNO. No, but it seems—

OTHERS. Sit down, Arno.

ARNO. What about Comrade Tausig?

SECRETARY. Next.

ARNO. How was I supposed to know—

SECRETARY. All in favour. [*The suggestion is passed. There is a slight respite. Improvisation.*] We will now read the roll of honour.

COMRADE [*gets up and reads*]. "Unit 2027—Killed in carrying out their proletarian duties: on the 3rd, Friedrich Meyers, Elsa Schorr; on the 12th, George Pfitzner. [*In the background a woman suddenly sobs. She is comforted by another and soon stops.*] Imprisoned or captured during this month, Paul Schnitzler, Ernst Tausig." [*Sits.*]

SECRETARY. This is no time for sentiment, but it would not be wrong to stop for one minute to remark upon the fine qualities of those valiant fighters who are now lost to our cause, some for ever. In the case of our slain fighters their merits are known to all of us. In the case of Ernst Tausig we must pause for serious consideration. It has been proposed by the unit functionaries that his name be added to the blacklist. But in accordance with usual procedure we have brought this matter to your attention in the hope of arriving at a wider understanding of the case. Comrade Tilly Westermann.

TILLY [*risés, wipes hands with small handkerchief*]. Since the reports on Ernst Tausig come from reliable sources we must give them strong credence. Briefly, he was first arrested in March. Three weeks later he was released. [*Carl turns around and looks into the face of the audience.*] At that time he knew he was being followed. They were hoping he would contact party members. This he positively did not do. Four days later he was picked up again. I saw him

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once after that in the hospital with his brother. [*Lapsing for one line into a less official, less impersonal attitude*] I didn't recognize him. He held my hand. . . . We wanted— [*Breaks off, stops for a minute, resumes the impersonal tone.*] It's no secret to most of you that I am bearing his child. This fact will seem to make for strong partiality on my part. But I protest that because Ernst Tausig was in a room when others identified prisoners is no reason to assume that he has turned informer. This is not the Tausig whom most of us have known and worked with in the last four years or more.

BAUM. Right!

ARNO. How about when Mickle saw him with the police in the Herfheim Street raid? Maybe he was just knitting a muffler while he was sitting there next to the driver!

SECRETARY. The comrades will please ask permission for the floor. [*Arno raises his hand.*] Comrade Arno?

ARNO [*on his feet*]. Personally, I'm sorry for Tausig. But who can take a chance nowadays? Even if he is not guilty, who can take a chance when the secret police have any connexion with him?

SECRETARY. Please be more specific.

ARNO. I mean he must go on the blacklist. Every unit paper in the country must carry his name and description. For our purposes he is deadly, dangerous.

SECRETARY [*recognizing Tilly*]. Comrade Westermann?

TILLY. I can't disagree with what has just been said—

ARNO. I should say not!

TILLY. But will the chair permit me to read a small note I received from Ernst last week?

SECRETARY. Please read the note.

TILLY [*reads*]. "They are taking my life by the inch. Day and night they press me for an answer—identify prisoners or be killed. I cannot last much longer. The terrible truth is they do not kill me. I am enclosing money which they handed over to me yesterday after forcing me to sit beside their chauffeur when they made a street raid. You

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may be sure I have kept my mouth shut. Love to Carl and you." [*The man with one shoe comes over and looks at the note.*]

SECRETARY. Before we decide the action in this case would any other comrade care to say something?

GIRL. Perhaps Comrade Stieglitz.

SECRETARY [*looking in his direction*]. I don't think . . .

[*Companion of Stieglitz whispers to him. He nods.*]

ZELDA. He says he will say a few words about the case.

SECRETARY. Comrade Stieglitz has just come back to us from three months in the Sonnenberg detention camp. [*Pointedly*] I will ask you to listen carefully—to these few remarks from one of our leading theoreticians.

[*All wait. The imposing-looking man gets up quietly and takes his place at the other side of the room, next to the secretary. He looks around him gently, smiles softly at Tilly.*]

STIEGLITZ [*small bandage on head*]. Always in such rare cases where there is a doubt as to the accused one's guilt it is the custom to be careful in consideration of the known facts. But a different face is placed on the matter in times of stress and danger. Often . . . [*He stops, thinks, continues.*] Often the class struggle . . . it seems to me . . . it seems to me . . . [*He stops, a little puzzled, plays with fringe of shawl.*] I was saying . . . [*Looks around helplessly. Walks over to his female companion.*] Where are we, Zelda?

ZELDA. With friends, Benno.

STIEGLITZ. What was I saying?

ZELDA. Please sit down, Benno.

STIEGLITZ. Take me home, Zelda. . . . [*Looks around helplessly.*] Zelda . . .

SECRETARY [*into the breach*]. I think it would be best if he were home.

ZELDA. Yes. We're going, Benno. I have your hat.

STIEGLITZ. I'll hold your hand. Good-bye, my friends, good-bye. You must come to my house for breakfast. We have the sunniest breakfast room . . . Yes . . .

[*She leads him out. The door is locked behind him. She*



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*has been admonished first to be careful. Baum blows his nose vigorously.*

BAUM. So have the devils broken that noble mind!

SECRETARY. Comrades, now is no time for sentiment! This is the hour of steel, when—— No sentiment!

*[But he himself has to hide his tear-filled eyes. Presently controls himself.]*

JULIUS. It's a pretty kettle of fish, I must say.

CARL *[suddenly up]*. I would like to say something in reference to my brother.

SECRETARY. Take the floor.

*[Piano and violin duo begins downstairs.]*

CARL. Comrades, you are wondering where the music comes from. This is the very same house in which my brother and myself were born and raised. My uncle and his old friend Seligmann are playing. The War, the revolution, the banishing of Jews from Germany, have turned their poor old hearts to water. These days you will find them for ever—the two of them—playing their Mozart and Beethoven sonatas. The music they are playing now is Mozart, the *andante* of the *C Major Sonata*—C Major, my dear comrades, is a very wholesome, beautiful key. You must excuse what may seem an irrelevant excursion into sentiment. But this is the first piece of Mozart my brother and I ever played together. When we came from school—I am surprised how fresh this dead life is in my memory—nineteen years back . . . But that's another story. *[Now suddenly turning hard]* But Mozart—is there time for music to-day? What are we fighting for? I need not answer the question. Yes, it is brother against brother. Many a comrade has found with deep realization that he has no home, no brother—even no mothers or fathers! What must we do here? Is this what you asked me? We must expose this one brother wherever he is met. Whosoever looks in his face is to point the finger. Children will jeer him in the darkest streets of his life! Yes, the brother, the erstwhile comrade, cast out! There is no brother, no family, no deeper mother than

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the working class. Long live the struggle for true democracy!  
[He sits now.]

[The music finishes before anyone speaks. The vote is called for. All raise their hands in assent except Tilly. She looks round at the others. One of the men is eating small nuts loudly. Her hand slowly goes up.]

FADEOUT

SCENE VII

Carl's room. Small. Only a door set up in centre. In darkness we hear two typewriters. When lights fade up we see Carl and Tilly each at a typewriter, typing. Tilly finally stops.

TILLY. A few mistakes.

CARL [older]. No matter.

TILLY. My heart hurts. Hurt me all day.

CARL. Take care. Lie down before we go.

TILLY. I can't rest. [Comes down to him.] Carl, I want to ask you—are you ever afraid?

CARL. Sometimes.

TILLY. Now? Tell the truth.

CARL. Yes, if you want it. The place we're going to is swarming with S.S. men. We might never come out alive. I'm not so masculine that I won't admit I'm scared.

TILLY. All day I had this pain under the heart.

CARL. When will the baby be coming?

TILLY. A long time yet.

CARL [in a low voice]. What will you call him?

TILLY. If it's a girl, I don't know. If it's a boy . . .

CARL. Not his name.

TILLY [suddenly clutching him]. Tell me, how do you know? What makes you so sure?

CARL. There's proof—plenty!

TILLY. You believe it?

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CARL. In the beginning I didn't. Maybe the Brown Shirts spread the tales themselves.

TILLY. They've done it before.

CARL. I don't say no. That's why I didn't believe a word I heard at first.

TILLY. Now you believe it.

CARL. Yes. Too many reliable comrades have checked on his activity.

TILLY. Maybe he's drugged. Maybe he walks in his sleep. You know—yes, you know—he would have found some way to do away with himself before he was forced to act as a spy. You know that! You know you do!

CARL [*trying to jest*]. Don't tear my shirt.

TILLY [*persistently*]. Answer the question!

CARL [*finally, in a burst*]. Goddamit, I say he's guilty!

TILLY. If he came here, broken in mind and body, would you refuse to see him? Can you stand there and tell me you wouldn't even listen to what he had to say?

CARL. To me he has nothing to say!

TILLY. He's your brother.

CARL. That won't sell a postage-stamp!

TILLY. Suppose he knocks on the door this minute!

CARL. You're in love.

TILLY. Answer what I ask!

CARL. What makes you think you're the only one? Maybe I slept better at night the last two months. Maybe I cried myself to sleep some nights. This big blustering idiot wept like a girl. [*Walks around.*] Yes, yes, the whole thing funnels up in me like fever. My head'll bust a vein!

TILLY [*catching herself*]. We're talking too loud.

CARL [*whispering, but with same intense flow*]. Seeing him together at the hospital the last time—the picture follows me like a dog. I'm sick—I tell you I'm sick of the whole damn' affair! [*Sitting*] Perhaps we ought to change—do our work apart. This way, this is a secret eating thing between us. Each reminds the other.

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TILLY. We'll talk about it to-morrow. I want to find a glass of milk before we start to work.

CARL. We'll get some at the corner.

TILLY. The baby has to eat. . . .

• [*He gets her coat. Smiles at its shabbiness.*]

CARL. Nothing is too good for the proletariat.

TILLY. I had a nice coat once. I had a mother. I had a father. I was a little girl with pigtails and her face scrubbed every morning. I was a good child. I believed in God. In summer I ate mulberries from our own tree. In late summer the ground was rotten where they fell. [*Knock at the door.*] Open the door. Don't ask who it is. It's Ernst, I know it is.

CARL [*looks at her, puzzled. Tilly goes to open door. He stops her. Whispering*]. Are you crazy?

TILLY. I know it's him.

CARL. Let the door alone.

VOICE [*outside*]. Carl. . . .

CARL [*covers door*]. You can't let him in.

TILLY. You can't keep him out. [*Waits.*] He's waiting. . . .

CARL. He'll go away.

TILLY. Maybe he's sick.

CARL. And the others in detention camps, they're not sick?

TILLY. You might be wrong.

CARL. Then better one mistake like this than a thousand arrests and murders.

• VOICE [*knocks without*]. Carl. . . .

TILLY. He won't leave. [*After another knock*] Give me the key, Carl.

[*Carl looks at her. Puts key on table. Walks away. She unlocks door with it. Opens wide the door. There stands Ernst. Looks terrible. Wears a large velour hat, black, making his face look small. This man, sick, broken, alone, desperate, bumble, something of amusement in him too. Has a hand-*]

*ful of coins he plays with. Clothes are too big on him. Looks like a ghost.*

ERNST. Tilly. . .

TILLY. Come in, Ernst.

ERNST. May I . . . ?

TILLY. Come in. . . .

*[He does so. Carl on side, back turned. Tilly locks door. Retains key. She takes off his overcoat. He is revealed in a soiled shirt, tails out at one side. Takes off his hat while he plays with coins and looks at floor. His hair is streaked with white. He seems abstracted. Finally becomes aware of room when coins drop out of his hand. He doesn't notice the coins.]*

ERNST. Tilly . . . Let me . . .

*[He slowly walks over to her, falls on his knees, kisses her hand. She draws her hand away.]*

CARL *[turning]*. Stand up. *[Ernst does so.]* What do you want?

ERNST. I came——

CARL. To tell us lies.

TILLY. Let him talk. There are enough executioners in Germany without——

CARL. For the present I'm not used to one in my own room. For the present I——

ERNST *[in a violent burst]*. No. Stop it. No!

CARL. What is "no"? Mickle saw you with the police. Arno saw you in the court. You give the secret police information!

TILLY. They'll hear you in the street!

ERNST. Listen to me—— *[Carl makes move for door. Ernst blocks it.]* I came to have a talk.

CARL. Get out of my way.

ERNST. No!

CARL *[pushes him away, throws him to floor. Finds door locked. Turns to Tilly. She puts the table between them]*. Give me the key.

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TILLY. No.

[*Carl looks at Ernst. Picks him up from floor. Sits aside.*]

ERNST. It's all right—I understand—you don't want to listen. It's all right—I'll talk to myself. It's a habit now. I talk to myself on the street, frighten children—frighten myself. Don't listen to me. I'll talk to the chair. Here. . . . [*Turns chair round, addresses it as if a person.*] Mr Chair! First, we understand the situation. Second, the charges are listed in our minds. [*Tilly, out of pity and terror, removes the chair which he has been addressing very earnestly. Finally Ernst continues in a low, intense voice.*] Now we must examine the living witness: what do you know of what happened? Who told you?

CARL [*jumping up fiercely*]. I won't listen to you.

ERNST [*jumping up the same*]. What am I asking of you? Pity? No! You must *know*, Tilly must know the accusations against me are untrue. I want you both to stand clear and proud in the world—not to think your brother and husband turned. . . .

CARL. I don't care for the personal issues.

ERNST. Then I care! For my son I care. He need never be ashamed to bear my name.

CARL. Every unit paper in the country screams out you're a rat.

ERNST. And they know?

CARL. You're damn' right they know.

ERNST. When I was released from the barracks in General Pape Street—did they know then?

CARL. That's four months back.

ERNST. They left me free that time.

CARL. Because you were supposed to lead them to the comrades.

ERNST. But I didn't.

CARL. Because you couldn't walk.

ERNST. So far so good, no?

TILLY. Yes. . . .

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ERNST. Then they picked me up again. The whole thing started fresh—questioned day and night. No let-up. Swollen, bleeding, the hospital again. What good was I to them dead? Suddenly you fall—a bucket of water—they stand you up—the lash—dig your nails into the wall to remain standing.

CARL. When did you make up your mind to tell?

ERNST. Not yet!

TILLY. Not yet?

ERNST. They tie your feet, seat you with the driver on the round-ups. This makes you seem a guide for them.

CARL. But you never sent a message, not a warning.

ERNST. Two dozen. Intercepted. You don't believe it?

CARL. No.

ERNST. You're made to stand outside the courtroom door where comrades pass.

CARL. We know all about it.

ERNST. Inside they say, "Don't make denials. Your former comrade told us everything." Some comrades believed that.

CARL. That explains the new clothes, money in your pocket?

ERNST. They dressed me up. That was the plan, to look like a paid stool-pigeon. Then the first leaflet appears: "Ernst Tausig is a paid stool-pigeon." Who printed them? Comrades? No, the Nazis. The comrades keep away. Out of the crowd some one hits me—it happens often. I turn round. Children hoot me on the street. All day and night the rank injustice freezes my heart to ice.

CARL. Why tell us, why—?

ERNST. They have a detective taking me home at nights. I live in his house. I can't understand. They did something to me. Sulphur is running in my veins. At night I wake up perspiring. My tongue is thick, my eyes won't open.

TILLY. Ernst, what can we do?

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ERNST. Nothing, nothing. Only I want you to believe me. I must have some one believing me. I'm not a traitor. I'm not so far gone I don't understand the position I'm in. I see what you must do to me. Warn all party members against me. You can't know the truth. Yes, what is one person like me against the whole enslaved German working class? I know I must be cast away. But you two can believe me. Yes, officially you need not believe—but yourselves. Carl, don't look at me that way!

CARL. What is that?

ERNST. What?

CARL. Perfume? You're using perfume? Ladyfingers and whipped cream for breakfast.

ERNST. No, you see how it was. They gave me money. It falls out of my hands. My mind wanders like smoke. I passed the store the other day and it was in the window. Perfumed soap. I bought some. A man must have something. It smells like flowers. [*Sits with abstracted quality. Finally says, after Carl removes leaflets on table from his sight:*] Five weeks ago—I think it was the 8th of last month—I don't remember—the day we had the thunder shower—the hand was badly infected—it seems I knocked it against the wall or something—the 9th or 10th—they amputated it. We had that fine surgeon D. B. Kellner. [*There is a luminous full pause. Yes, his hand has been removed, and all this time he kept the stump in a pocket. Does not take it out now either. Tilly, unbearably moved, comes to him. He refuses her touch. Jumps up.*] Don't touch me. No, it isn't so easy. Three months—it's not so easy. That's why I'm telling you. *You must know everything!* Last night I sat in my room and it came to me. I was thinking that when I went there the next day I would tell them everything. [*Laughs and changes voice to a whisper.*] Do you know what you must do? I brought the whole thing with me. A gun, cleaned, oiled. This morning I did it. With one hand it isn't easy. Kill me!

CARL. What?



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ERNST. Take the gun. Carl, you loved me once. Kill me. One day more and I'll stand there like an idiot identifying prisoners for them. I know so many. In all honour and courage you must pull the little trigger. I brought the money. Put it in the fighting fund. Maybe tell a few comrades the truth.

CARL. It is the truth?

ERNST. Yes.

TILLY. There must be no talk of dying.

ERNST. For me there's one thing, Tilly—nothing is left to do. Carl——?

CARL. They've killed you already.

ERNST. That's right. But you're alive. Other comrades are working. The day is coming and I'll be in the final result. That right can't be denied me. In that dizzy, dazzling structure some part of me is built. You must understand. Take the gun, Carl.

CARL [*drawing hand away*]. I won't do it.

ERNST. I couldn't do it myself! There isn't enough strength left. . . . Tilly, no tears! [*Smiles wearily.*] Such bourgeois traits in a worker. . . . What is your answer, Carl?

CARL. That is what you must do. Do it yourself. Before you turn idiot. When you do that the world will know you were innocent. They'll see you came voluntarily, that . . . [*Suddenly*] Who am I to sit in judgment?

ERNST. These guns are complicated pieces of machinery. [*Has picked it up.*] Our Germans make them like works of art. [*Weighs the gun in his hand.*] Tilly, Carl, our agony is real. But we live in the joy of a great coming people! The animal kingdom is past. Day must follow the night. Now we are ready: we have been steeled in a terrible fire, but soon all the desolate places of the world must flourish with human genius. Brothers will live in the soviets of the world! Yes, a world of security and freedom is waiting for all mankind! [*Looks at them both deeply. Walks to door to room L.*] Do your work, comrades. [*Goes out.*]

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TILLY [*for a moment stands still. Then starts for room.*  
*Carl stops her*]. Carl, stop him, stop him!

[*Carl holds her back.*

CARL. Let him die. . . .

TILLY. Carl . . .

[*Shot heard within.*

CARL. Let him live. . . .

SLOW CURTAIN



*The United States*  
,  
WORLD WITHOUT END  
A PLAY IN ONE ACT  
By PERCIVAL WILDE

## CHARACTERS

### *Humans*

JOHN  
BILL  
RICHARD  
CHARLES  
LEWIS  
DENNIS  
AN OLD MAN  
MARY  
MYRTLE  
EDITH  
GERTRUDE  
SUSAN  
AN OLD WOMAN  
MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN

### *Non-Humans*

A LECTURER  
A QUESTIONER  
OTHERS

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## WORLD WITHOUT END

*Facing us, and occupying the whole of the proscenium opening, is a large cage of the kind in which lions or tigers were, in our times, confined in zoological parks. Rusted iron bars—not too heavy—run from its top to its bottom, the latter being elevated somewhat above the ground level. As was customary, the rear wall, of heavy logs or of rock, is also the wall of the inner cage provided for winter shelter. It is pierced by the usual low opening. It has no door.*

*Bars at the sides separate the cage from others whose occupants, if any, do not appear. A heavy gate is let into the bars at the front, a little to the left of the centre. A massive padlock, dangling from a rusted chain, suggests that the gate was once kept locked. Now, however, it is ajar, and the padlock is useless.*

*A wooden sign, rotten with age, is all askew on the light chains which suspend it near the top of the cage. It reads:*

FELIS LEO

*Habitat: Africa*

*Below the cage, and partly hiding its foundation, is rankly growing grass. Down left is a small flowering bush. At the extreme right is a tree. The light is that of afternoon.*

*In the cage are human beings. They are of all ages. The faces of the men are covered with hair; it is evident they have never shaved. The hair of their heads falls to their shoulders. The women, for the most part, are an untidy lot. Both sexes wear primitive clothing, comparable only to the attire of savages. It appears to be made of the hides of small animals—goats, dogs, and the like. It provides the men with rudimentary nether garments, the women with a little more.*

*Seated on one of several sawed-off tree-stumps, which seem to have*

survived from remote times, is a middle-aged woman. She is nursing a naked infant. Squatted near the centre is an aged man. He is chewing at a bone. We notice another man, with hands clasped behind his back, jaw thrust out, and the upper part of his powerful body bowed. He is pacing the length of the cage, back and forth, back and forth, drawing back his lips, and snarling every time he turns—exactly like an animal. Other men enter and leave the outer cage through the small opening at the rear. They drop naturally to all fours, walking on their feet and their knuckles as they pass through the opening. Most of their movements are aimless; but they investigate objects they find on the floor, biting into them, finding some edible, some not. A woman finds something and attempts to secrete it. Two men rush at her, one of them snatches it away from her, and the three, clawing and snarling and spitting, rush out through the inner door. The woman with the infant finishes nursing it, turns it face down across her lap, and slaps it gently—as has probably been done for a million years. Then she picks it up and goes out at the rear, and the old man with the bone seats himself on the stump she has vacated. The man who is pacing up and down never halts for an instant.

A girl of fifteen or thereabouts, decidedly attractive, with golden hair flowing over her bare shoulders, enters from the rear, and runs to the bars facing us to the right of the centre. She looks out eagerly, expectantly, yet not without terror. After a moment she is followed by a young man a year or two older, whose facial hair has not yet begun to grow. He goes to her, takes her gently by the shoulders, and begins to kiss the back of her neck. She takes absolutely no notice of him, continuing to gaze from side to side expectantly. He embraces her more closely, pulling her head back, so that her cheek is against his lips. She raises her arm, without looking about, and pats his face. She rubs his cheek. Then, for the first time, she shows surprise, and turns her head.

MARY. Oh, it's you, John?

WORLD WITHOUT END

JOHN. Yes.

MARY. You're the only man who hasn't kissed me before. I thought it was one of the others.

JOHN [*with sudden vehemence*]. I hate it when the others kiss you!

MARY [*wide-eyed*]. Do you?

JOHN. I want to have you all to myself. . . . [*He reasons aloud.*] Before to-day I never thought of kissing you. I saw the other men do it, but I was used to that. I never thought of doing it myself. [*She smiles. She is wiser than he.*] I liked you very much. I liked you so much that sometimes I felt lightheaded. We had such jolly times together, didn't we?

MARY. Yes.

JOHN. Sometimes I kiss my mother. I've never kissed anybody else. Suddenly I wanted to kiss you.

MARY. Why?

JOHN. I don't know. I had to do it.

MARY. You did it.

JOHN. I'm glad I did it. Aren't you? [*She smiles mysteriously.*] It was while I was doing it that I hated the thought of anybody else doing it.

MARY. Why?

JOHN. I felt that way. I don't know why. Now—now—I'd like to do it again.

[*Silently she puts up her lips. He seizes her and kisses her hungrily.*]

MARY. Did you feel the same way again?

\* JOHN. Yes; terribly. [*Timidly*] Mary, would you promise me—not to kiss the others?

MARY. It would be against our customs.

JOHN. I hate our customs!

MARY. I have been taught to obey them. . . . Do you know how old you are, John?

JOHN. Fifteen or twenty, I think.

MARY. Doesn't your mother know?

JOHN. She's forgotten. She's had so many children since.



MARY. Did you never ask your father?

JOHN [*simply*]. I was never sure which was my father. . . . They used to say it was the old man with the little hands: the one they called Henry.

MARY. I remember him.

JOHN. He died five or ten years ago: the night of the big storm. They threw his body out there. [*He points through the gate, down left.*] All the women kissed him first, because he was the father of so many children; and then the men threw him as far as they could. I saw him there for a week. Then the grass grew higher and hid him.

MARY. Did you like him very much?

JOHN. He had little hands. He told me many stories. He was very gentle. I liked him—[*a flash of introspection*] but not the same way, Mary, that I like you.

MARY. My father is very rough. He has big hands. He hits me if I get in his way. [*Matter of fact*] I know which is my father: they used to call him the rebel, because he didn't care about our customs, and he wouldn't let any other man come near his women. They didn't, until he grew old. He used to be very strong.

JOHN. I wish I were strong. Then I would do what your father did: I wouldn't let the other men come near you. Would you like that? [*She nods silently.*] But I wouldn't like to be old, and have the others take you from me.

MARY. It is our custom.

JOHN. I don't like our customs. [*He breaks off abruptly and stares out.*] Look!

MARY. Are they coming?

JOHN. I see the first of them. The grass is bending over with their weight.

MARY [*joining him*]. The sand is turning grey—dark grey.

JOHN. They're coming: it's time.

THE MAN WHO SNARLS [BILL]. Aw-rrrrh!

MARY [*turning to him*]. Stop it!

BILL. Rrrr-what?

WORLD WITHOUT END

MARY. Stop it!

BILL. Rrrr-why should I stop it?

MARY. It makes me nervous.

BILL. Ha! If you was born in this cage, like I was——

MARY. Of course I was born here.

BILL [*who is clearly in the thirties*]. If you'd lived here, forty years, fifty years, sixty years, like I done——

MARY. I've lived here all my life.

BILL. —you'd 'ave gotten used to it. You're gonna get used to it.

MARY. I don't want to get used to it.

JOHN. Stop it, Bill!

BILL [*like a dog*]. Aw-urrrh!

JOHN. Down, Bill! Down!

BILL. Awrrr-yes, sir. [*He sinks slowly into a crouching position near the left lower corner, lying on his side with his knees bunched up against the bars.*] Awrrrh!

[*He remains in that position. During the preceding all of the others except these three have gradually vacated the cage, withdrawing into the inner cage.*]

MARY [*lowering her voice*]. Thank you, John. It was kind of you.

JOHN [*also lowering his voice*]. I want to be kind to you——always. [*He puts his arm about her shoulders as they stare out.*]

MARY. They're coming. The ground is turning black with them.

JOHN. Always at this hour, every day. Twice in the morning; then at noon; again at this hour; once more at sundown.

MARY. I used to wonder why they did that.

JOHN. You used to wonder? [*With realization, emphasizing heavily*] You *used* to wonder. Do you mean that you *know* now? Was that what you meant?

MARY. Yes.

JOHN. But it can't be! For hundreds of years our fathers, and their fathers, and those who came before them have been trying to find out. You can't know!

MARY. I know.

JOHN. Tell me, then.

MARY. Not now.

JOHN. Tell me! Tell me!

MARY. After they have gone—perhaps.

JOHN. A promise?

MARY. It would be better if I didn't tell you.

JOHN. Is it as awful as that?

MARY. Awful—and simple—very simple—and challenging! Challenging to all that is in me!

JOHN [*bewildered*]. Mary!

MARY. So simple that it never occurred to the others—and terrible—[*fingering back her head*] but most of all challenging! [*He stares at her.*] Hush! They're coming! [*She looks out.*] A million of them!

JOHN. Ten millions!

MARY. Twenty, fifty, a hundred millions!

JOHN. I wonder why—and you know!

MARY. Hush! Hush!

[*They look out, staring from side to side. He is about to speak; she silences him with a gesture. Then presently we hear an extraordinary voice. It is amazingly high-pitched. It might be the voice of a child were not its elocution so remarkable, so completely unprecedented. It takes words apart into syllables, and gives them equal lengths in a chant on one piercingly high note. It departs from that note only on syllables preceding a comma or a period, which it lengthens out a little and utters with a pleasantly rising inflection, a happy unmelodious cadence, which comes to a full stop at the end of each sentence. The voice is uniformly cheerful. It speaks words as if they possessed no meaning whatever. Its enunciation is more than precise: every 'the' is pronounced 'thee.' Discourse pauses at every punctuation mark, and these do not conform with rules. The effect produced is that of a*

WORLD WITHOUT END

*rapid, monotonous, happy, and uncannily sinister rat-a-tat-tat.*

THE LECTURER. We come, we come, now, to our most interesting exhibit. In this, in this, cage, humans. [*There is the hubbub of many similar voices raised in inarticulate exclamations of wonder. The sound resembles that of numerous shrill whistles, softly blown.*] Before we, before we, the insects conquered the earth, these were, these were the lords of creation. [*There is a curious sound in the same high pitch: the laughter of a great throng of tiny individuals. It is hearty laughter: its shrill whistling continues for some time.*] Before we, before we, the insects swept every other creature out of our path, these were, these were, the mightiest race that ever, walked, the earth. [*Prolonged laughter.*] They knew, they knew, they did, they did, they ruled, they ruled, everything. They can not, they can not, understand, what I am saying. They do not, they do not, know, our speech, these creatures, these creatures who thought they knew, everything. [*Laughter.*] Moreover, moreover my voice is so high, that, their dull ears, their dull ears, cannot hear it, or they might, they might, become angry and tread on many of us. [*A pause; a hush.*] Then we, then we, would, kill, them but we do not wish to do that. Why should, why should we kill them? Armies, armies, gave their lives so that humans, the last, humans from which are come these might be brought to the place where you now, see them.

JOHN. Black! Black as far——

MARY [*interrupting*]. Hush!

JOHN [*looking at her incredulously*]. Do you hear something? I don't.

MARY. Hush!

THE LECTURER. Look, look at them. These are, these are the last of mankind.

A QUESTIONER [*in the same high voice and the same manner*]. How were, how were, those from whom they are come put, into the cages?

THE LECTURER. A good, a good, question. First our,

first our, fighting men slew the large beasts which were in the cages. They roared, they roared, we slew them. Then we, then we could not open the gates into the cages. Our fighting, our fighting, men, gathered about the humans with stings, and made them open, them open, the cages. Then we made them, we made them, enter the cages.

THE QUESTIONER. Will they, will they, never leave the cages?

THE LECTURER. Never never, never never. Like those, like those who came before them, they were born, they will die, in the cages.

THE QUESTIONER. But the gate, but the gate, is open.

THE LECTURER. The gate, the gate, is always open but they do not leave. One, one step, into the line which marks our soldiers, our soldiers, and they die. These, and all of them that ever were have tried it, have tried it, and have run back into the cage screaming, screaming.

JOHN. Look here, Mary!

MARY. Not now! Please!

THE QUESTIONER. How do, how do, we feed them?

THE LECTURER. We drive, we drive, into the cage small beasts which they kill and which they eat. With their skins, their skins, they clothe themselves. Are there, are there other questions? [*A pause.*] There are, there are, males and females. Look, look at them, closely. A big, a big male is sleeping. I shall, I shall have him waked for you.

MARY. Now! Watch!

JOHN. What am I to watch?

MARY. Watch Bill!

*[Even before he turns Bill leaps to his feet, slapping at his feet and screaming.]*

THE LECTURER. You see, you see?

*[There is a gale of laughter, extremely shrill, far louder than any before, as Bill bends, and strikes at an ankle.]*

JOHN. They did the same thing to you before, Bill.

WORLD WITHOUT END

BILL. They done it often before, damn 'em! Why don't they pick on one of you? . . . Now, don't ya tell me to lie down again! See?

JOHN. Not now.

BILL. They've got it in for me! Damned vermin! Aw-urrrh! [*He begins to pace back and forth once more.*]

JOHN [*lowering his voice*]. You knew what was going to happen? [*She nods.*] How did you know?

MARY. Hush!

THE LECTURER. Now, now, our fighting men let him sleep, once more. Sleep, man! Sleep, man! For many many, many many, seasons, you and those who came before you have slept while we have watched. He does, he does not wish to sleep. [*Some laughter.*] In waking, in waking, him, we have lost the lives of a few soldiers, a few soldiers, but we have learned as the humans, the humans, never learned, that the life of one man or one nation is nothing to the life of the species. The object, the object, of life is multiplication, not division. Questioner, questioner!

THE QUESTIONER. I am here, I am here.

THE LECTURER. Go, go quickly into the cage where he will crush you. [*A pause. Mary gasps, turning.*]

BILL [*whacking suddenly at his leg*]. That was only a little one, but they sting just as bad as the big ones.

MARY [*to Bill*]. Did it hurt much?

BILL. Don't ya know?

MARY. It's years since I've been stung.

BILL. Yeah? I seen one of 'em biting ya yesterday.

MARY. I don't remember it.

THE LECTURER. In the next, the next, cage, we have other strange animals, but they, but they, were not the lords of creation. The humans, the humans, they were the lords of creation, the wisest, the wisest, the mightiest, the mightiest, race that ever walked. . . .

[*The voice has died out into nothingness.*]

JOHN. You can lie down again, Bill. They're going. I can see their black thinning out into grey.

PERCIVAL WILDE

BILL. I don't take no more chances—not me.

[*He goes into the inner cage.*]

JOHN. You heard them?

MARY. Yes.

JOHN. They spoke, and you heard what they were saying?

MARY. Yes.

JOHN. They have a language, and you understand it?

MARY. Yes.

JOHN. Quick! What did they say?

MARY. I'm afraid to tell you.

JOHN. Afraid? Why should you be afraid?

MARY. You won't believe. I can hardly believe myself. But I'll tell you this much: beyond the gate——

[*She pauses.*]

JOHN. Are the stinging insects.

MARY. Yes—and beyond them . . .

JOHN. There is nothing beyond them.

MARY. Beyond them is a great, wonderful world!

JOHN. Did they say that?

MARY. Not in so many words. I reasoned it out. [*He stares at her.*] In this cage, long before we were born, lived great beasts.

JOHN. They said that, too?

MARY. They said it, and I heard it.

JOHN. But how could you hear?

MARY [*looking around cautiously before speaking*]. One night—twenty or forty days ago—the man William took me into his arms. [*Looking around again*] The women don't like William. He has sharp nails. He digs them into your shoulders—like this—so that they bleed. I screamed, and he hit me—hard—on the ear.

JOHN. I'll kill him.

MARY. He hit me—hard. When you speak to me I can't hear you with this ear. But ever since he hit me I have been able to hear *them*. Their voices are so high that they seem to come from up here. [*She touches the top of her head.*] I could

WORLD WITHOUT END

hear them. I listened every day. Suddenly I began to understand.

JOHN. It's impossible!

MARY. I knew you'd say that.

*[Many men and women are now entering from the inner cage. John turns to a dignified old man who is among the first.]*

JOHN. Richard, she says she hears them!

RICHARD. What?

JOHN. They have a language, she says.

RICHARD *[looking at her]*. Babble!

JOHN. A spoken language.

RICHARD. She is sick. Her cheeks are red.

MARY. I am not sick.

RICHARD. She is dying. I have heard others speak as she did before they died.

MARY. But I heard them speak!

RICHARD *[turning his back on her, and addressing the others]*. It is the day and the hour for the reading of the Book. *[He has taken his position at the side of one of the wooden stumps, exactly as if it were a lectern. The other men and women, a crowd of all ages, have squatted facing him, on the floor of the cage. John and Mary have joined them. Richard announces solemnly:]* The reading of the Book!

*[The seated crowd sways forward in an obeisance. Two men enter from the inner cage. Each carries a small parcel carefully wrapped in ancient cloths.]*

THE FIRST MAN *[offering his parcel]*. The Eye.

RICHARD *[opening the parcel, and holding up a cheap magnifying-glass]*. The Eye through which we see! *[The crowd makes obeisance.]* When I am gone others will use it: the three I taught to read.

THE SECOND MAN *[offering his parcel]*. The Book.

RICHARD *[removing the cloths and holding up a battered loose-leaf notebook]*. The Book which teaches us to remember! *[Obeisance.]* The book written by Frederick, handed down to his children, and to his children's children, and so from



one to another since the beginning of all things. [*In the manner of a preacher*] One week ago I read to you from the thirtieth chapter of the Wars. The Book says, "Millions were slain in every one of them." Millions of insects, naturally, for there never could have been millions of us. Simon, who died when I was a child, believed that once we had been as many as the grains of sand. Simon liked to speak a line from the twenty-eighth chapter. [*He has opened the book, and reads with difficulty through the glass.*] "An epoch-making feat took place in the brief war of twenty-one hundred and sixty-eight, when the entire population of Canada was obliterated in two days." We do not understand the line. We do not know the meaning of the marks which I read as "epoch-making feat" and "obliterate." We do not know the meaning of "Canada," which is made with a capital letter. We have never heard the word "population." But, as Simon used to say, it seems clear that something happened to "Canada."

A SEATED MAN. "Canada" was a large ant-hill.

RICHARD. Charles thinks it was a large ant-hill. I do not know what to say. Simon thought otherwise, speaking the next line, "That made possible the achievement of fifty years later, when the continent of Africa was reduced, overnight, to a howling waste." There has been much talk over the meaning of the line. It has so many words that have been lost to us that there will always be talk. "Achievement," "continent," "Africa," "howling waste": these are strange, and the bottom of the page, which might have told us something about them, has been missing for hundreds of years.

THE SEATED MAN. "Africa" was another ant-hill.

[*A fight breaks out between two women and a man in the rear of the throng.*]

RICHARD [*thundering at the fighters*]. Silence! Once a week, that we may remember, we read from the Book! [*The fight ends abruptly.*] Here beginneth the eleventh chapter of the Book of Terminus. "Terminus," as I have taught

you, comes from 'termite,' meaning 'insect.' The first ten chapters tell of the rise of the insects, who could bury themselves in the earth, who could protect themselves in cocoons, who could multiply a thousand-fold, as our weaker race could not. "Men could destroy millions," says the Book, "but only the insects could bring forth millions. Jungles arose where cities had been."

MARY. What is the meaning of "jungles"? What is the meaning of "cities"?

RICHARD. I, too, have asked that question. I do not know. "Deserts spread over the valleys of the Danube, the Yangtse-kiang, and the Mississippi." Not a single word we understand here. "The insects, which had always been a threat to human domination, began to control large areas of the earth"—the words of Frederick. If he were living he could tell us what they mean, but no man lives hundreds of years. [*Reading*] "On June fourteenth, A.D. twenty-four hundred and one, the yacht *Herodotus* was at sea when a radio message brought us the news that the long-expected war between North and South America, on the one hand, and Europe and what little remained of Asia, on the other hand, had broken out." Again, hardly a word that we understand. "In less than a week life was completely extinguished in the Old World, and while the New World was rejoicing a subtle emanation, never identified, took effect, and wiped out all the survivors too. I expected that the same emanation would affect [*he turns a page, as he has been doing from time to time*] ships at sea."

MARY. "Ships at sea"?

RICHARD. The meaning is not known. "I was right. A dreadful, indescribable week followed. The largest steamships hove into sight, smoke pouring from their funnels, while they drove on at full speed until they crashed into rocks, or into each other, and foundered. Again and again we had narrow escapes. The sea was full of derelicts, gigantic liners, motionless, their fuel having run out, showing no lights, at the mercy of the waves, until they were

washed ashore; palatial yachts, merchant vessels of every description, warships, big and small. Never before, in all recorded history, had the human eye beheld such a sight." The last sentence we understand: "Never before . . . had the human eye beheld such a sight." But when we try to explain what comes before that, what was the nature of the sight, we are like children who seek, in the dark. [*He turns a page. It has grown a little darker, and he peers through the glass as he deciphers the words.*] "It was evident that some quirk of wind or tide had spared the souls aboard the *Herodotus* from the disaster which overwhelmed the rest of mankind. Fearing to land, however, we planned to remain at sea as long as our supplies held out, replenishing both fuel and provisions, whenever possible, from the stores of the derelicts which we encountered daily. This, we hoped, would not make it necessary for us to land on shores dominated by hostile insects, but would permit us to remain at sea for an indefinite length of time." Here endeth the eleventh chapter of the Book of Terminus. [*The audience makes obeisance, and rises. Richard closes the book. The men wrap it and the magnifying-glass. Richard raises his hand in a Fascist salute.*] Amen.

OMNES [*saluting in the same manner*]. Amen.

MARY [*to John*]. Why do they always say that?

JOHN. Why do they always say anything?

A WOMAN (MYRTLE) [*to John*]. I think our old customs are beautiful, even if nobody knows what they mean. [*She indicates Richard, who has taken a stand next to the inner door, and who is greeting each member of the congregation as he or she goes out.*] Now I think that's just lovely!

A WOMAN [*at the inner door*]. You were so eloquent to-day, Richard.

RICHARD. Thank you, Edith.

ANOTHER WOMAN (GERTRUDE). How do you do, Richard?

RICHARD. It's an unusual pleasure to see you at our readings, Gertrude.

WORLD WITHOUT END

GERTRUDE. It's not that I don't want to come, Richard——

RICHARD. No?

GERTRUDE. But my four men make so many demands on my time—— *[She goes out.]*

STILL ANOTHER WOMAN *[to Myrtle]*. What a pretty dress you're wearing, Myrtle.

MYRTLE *[who is attired in next to nothing]*. I have a perfect figure, everybody tells me. I can wear anything.

AN OLD WOMAN. Richard, I used to know Simon too——

RICHARD. Yes?

THE OLD WOMAN. But he never touched my heart the way you do. Lovely weather we're having, isn't it?

*[She goes out.]*

RICHARD *[to a man]*. So you came, Lewis, and brought your family?

LEWIS. There can be only one meaning to "Canada": a large ant-hill. One Canada here; *[pointing]* another there; another there.

A YOUNG WOMAN. Will you give me another reading lesson to-morrow, Richard?

RICHARD. You read almost as well as I do, Susan.

A POWERFUL MAN (DENNIS). Hello, Mary!

*[He takes her in his arms and kisses her.]*

JOHN. Look here, Dennis——

DENNIS. Don't you like me to kiss her?

JOHN. No.

DENNIS *[seizing her roughly]*. It's one of our customs that any man can——

JOHN *[interrupting]*. It's a wrong custom.

DENNIS. Is it? *[He strikes out unexpectedly, knocking John flat.]* Tell me more about it some time, won't you? *[He bends over Mary, and kisses her again, savagely.]* I'll be seeing you again later.

*[He goes out, kicking John as he passes. He is the last to leave, and except for John and Mary the cage is empty.]*

PERCIVAL WILDE

MARY [*running over*]. Did he hurt you much?

JOHN [*still on the floor*]. Why don't you follow him? He is stronger than I am. It is his right to take you.

MARY. I don't like him.

JOHN. What has that to do with it?

MARY. I like you. When he hit you I knew it hurt you—and it hurt me too.

JOHN [*rising and taking her hands*]. You love me.

MARY. That is a bad word, and I was taught never to speak it.

JOHN. You love me.

MARY. I love you.

JOHN. We love each other—but he will take you from me, and the others will take you from me; and you will be the mother of many children which are not mine.

MARY. John, would you like to have me for your own—always?

JOHN. *Would I?*

MARY. You can—if you are brave enough.

JOHN. Tell me: what shall I do?

MARY. You need not be strong; you need only be brave. [*She pauses.*] John, I heard what they were saying out there. I understood. Beyond the gate is a world we have never seen. . . .

JOHN. Beyond the gate are pain and suffering——

MARY. But beyond them a world! Perhaps we must pass through pain before we can come to it. Perhaps we can not pass. But we shall try, John. [*She takes his hand.*] Are you afraid? Are you afraid . . . to die?

[*Sunset has come. It grows darker, and fantastic streaks of light flit over the scene.*]

JOHN. Not with you, Mary. . . . With you I am not afraid. . . . [*He looks out.*] Black! The ground is turning black!

MARY. Hush!

JOHN. Black!

WORLD WITHOUT END

THE LECTURER. We come, we come, now, to our most interesting exhibit. In this, in this, cage, humans.

[*As before, a whistling hubbub of voices.*]

MARY. If you could only hear what he is saying!

JOHN. Tell me, Mary!

THE LECTURER. Before we, before we, the insects conquered the earth, these were, these were the lords of creation.

[*As before, shrill laughter.*]

MARY. "Before we, the insects, conquered the earth these were the lords of creation."

JOHN. We shall be again!

THE LECTURER. Before we, before we, the insects swept every other creature out of our path, these were, these were, the mightiest race that ever, walked, the earth.

MARY. "The mightiest race that ever walked the earth"!

THE LECTURER. They knew, they knew, they did, they did, they ruled, they ruled, everything.

MARY. "They ruled everything"!

JOHN. Let us show them!

MARY. Come! [*She thrusts the gate wide open.*]

THE LECTURER [*more rapidly; with excitement*]. They are, they are, opening, the gate! Look look, look look! They are, they are, coming, out!

JOHN [*as they leap out*]. Beyond pain and suffering!

[*They stand, hand in hand, a pace beyond the cage, staring, finally staring down and from side to side.*]

MARY [*pointing down*]. Look, John! I can see them stinging me! [*He nods.*] But I feel no pain!

JOHN [*bewildered*]. Nor I.

MARY [*in a sudden flash of intuition*]. They have done it to us so often, to us and our fathers, that they cannot hurt us any longer! Look! My leg is covered with them! I brush them off! I stamp on them! I crush them!

JOHN. I, I too!

[*During the foregoing an enormous hubbub of insect voices has been growing. Now it rises deafeningly, like uncountable shrill whistles. A woman who*]

PERCIVAL WILDE

*has entered the cage from the rear shouts something to the humans in the inner cage. They come rushing into the outer cage, staring, shouting, screaming. For an instant the deafening whistle ceases.*

MARY [*turning back*]. Follow us who dæres!

BILL. I'll foller!

*[He leaps out. He stands a moment, convulsed in agony. He falls at full length.]*

MARY [*turning*]. Yonder! Yonder! Brave new world!

*[Hand in hand, Mary and John walk slowly towards us and off at the left. Richard, in the cage, slams the gate shut, and stands at it with arms outspread to prevent any others from leaving. The shrill whistles resume, blotting out all other sound.]*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

## *The British Isles*

### THE LITTLE THEATRE MOVEMENT

It is an extraordinary phenomenon in literary history: the development and growth of the Little Theatre movement in the British Isles.

The Little Theatre movement may be defined broadly as an experiment which begins with self-entertainment and ends in self-interpretation. When a communal group, given to exhibitionism or looking for amusement or hoping to raise funds, stages a play picked out of a catalogue because it is warranted to contain six or eight good parts the result is amateur theatricals. When precisely the same group, instead of seeking vehicles which afford opportunities for what may loosely be termed 'histrionism,' presents the significant works of contemporary dramatists, selecting them first of all for content and freshness, and bears in mind that its ultimate object is to stimulate its own local writers, so that they in turn may interpret their community to the world, the result is Little Theatre. Amateur theatricals take more than they give; the Little Theatre gives more than it takes.

To the Abbey Theatre, in Dublin, belongs the distinction of being the progenitor of the movement. Under the guidance of Lady Gregory, important not only as the author of some of its most distinguished plays, but as its financial mainstay and the driving-force behind Synge, Yeats, Ervine, and a score of other writers, it demonstrated the value of an institution dedicated to the interpretation of an environment. It preached a doctrine which was new at the time: that the theatre should speak for, as well as to, an audience, and that the terms of its utterance, whether realistic, or fantastic, or



representative of fresh technique and viewpoints, meant less than the fact that the theatre had something to say—and said it. It began its existence in an era when authors were catering to the tastes of stars, concocting dramatic *pousse-café*s for actors and actresses, and thinking less about life than about flashy theatrics. In contrast with the bills of the purely commercial theatre the Abbey offered honestly observed human nature, characters which were convincingly real, and plays in which men and women ceased to be rhetoricians, orators, and tricksters in order to become humble servants of the truth.

Across the Irish Sea the work of the Abbey was ably seconded by Miss Horniman, first at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, and then at the Playhouse, Liverpool (still conducted by William Armstrong). Other organizations followed in Glasgow and Birmingham, but the movement, as a whole, did not take root. The English were accustomed to 'amateur theatricals.' They looked askance at ventures which did not seem greatly dissimilar, and which appeared to have little prospect of realizing their aims.

In retrospect it seems odd that the movement chose to leap the long distance across the Atlantic before establishing itself more securely at home. But the Press of the period is full of exclamations of wonder at the great number of Little Theatres in the United States, and the lack of them, save for isolated organizations in a few widely separated cities, in the land of their birth. It was not until long after the reverberations of the War had died out that the movement began to spread considerably in England—and then it made up in the speed and the luxuriance of its growth for whatever time it had missed. By then it had created a literature of its own, had supplied dozens of famous actors, directors, and playwrights to the commercial theatre, and had acquired the prestige which was lacking at the outset. It was no longer an experiment: it had solid accomplishments to its credit. At the beginning it had been a strange venture, suspicious because it was different. Suddenly it was a success by virtue

## THE LITTLE THEATRE MOVEMENT

of its very difference; those who had been wary hastened to embrace it, and opposition vanished.

There is no room, in a *résumé* so brief as this, for a detailed account of the individual enterprises whose success led naturally to the founding of others of the same kind. It is enough to state that at the present writing not only does every English city of any consequence possess an organization definitely aligned with the Little Theatre movement, but also it is possible, in such cities as Leeds, Birmingham, Newcastle, and Liverpool, to spend every evening of the week, during the winter months, witnessing a different production sponsored by such organizations.

Merely to state that the one-act play, which has always been and continues to be the pioneer form, is flourishing in the British Isles as nowhere else in the world is not sufficiently definite. Exact figures, made available by Mr J. W. Marriott, are more illuminating.

So-called drama tournaments, in which a number of plays are presented by various organizations, and the best production is awarded a prize, are popular in England as well as in the United States. The best-known American tournament is held annually in New York City. It attracts between fifteen and twenty entries. This may be contrasted with the records of the annual tournament of the British Drama League, which culminates in a final at the Old Vic, in London:

1931: 490 entries

1932: 632 entries

1933: 707 entries

1934: 834 entries

1935: 968 entries

Since a great number of preliminary rounds is needed to eliminate all but 2 per cent. of the entries before the finals, it may be estimated that the one tournament calls for several thousand play productions, and requires the participation as directors, actors, scene-designers and builders, and general staff of a number of persons which cannot be less than 20,000.

## THE BRITISH ISLES

It will be noted that the table deals with only the most important of the many tournaments.

It will be noted also that it deals with a series of 'depression' years.

Where there is a demand for one-act plays a supply will be forthcoming. It is most unusual in the United States for an established dramatist to work in the one-act field; but the English, Scottish, and Irish writers whose position is such that their full-length plays command the respect of managers and who have, nevertheless, recently written in the briefer form include Clifford Bax, Harold Brighouse, James Bridie, Noel Coward, John Drinkwater, Neil Grant, Ian Hay, A. A. Milne, Séan O'Casey, Eden Phillpotts, and Lennox Robinson, while playwrights who work principally in that medium and who are now active include Sydney Box, Olive Conway, Joe Corrie, Lord Dunsany, Gertrude Jennings, Philip Johnson, the Honourable Mary Pakington, and F. Sladen-Smith.

Considering the number of writers, and both the quality and quantity of their work, it may be said that they constitute a group which cannot be matched by all the other countries of the world.

As may be expected, the sales of printed one-act plays are enormously larger in the British Isles than anywhere else. In a court action involving an alleged piracy sworn testimony was introduced to prove that three anthologies issued by a single publisher had sold in excess of 250,000 copies. Several such volumes have sold more than 50,000 copies in a year.

FROM a consideration of the one-act play in the country which is its present-day paradise we may turn to that of a British writer whose contribution has been among the most notable.

Harold Brighouse was born in Eccles, Lancashire, in 1882. The pioneer work of Miss Horniman in Manchester, where he was educated, gave him an opportunity to experiment in

the theatre, and Miss Horniman was the producer of many of his early plays. From the beginning Brighouse has possessed a deep intuition, keen sympathy with the folk he knows so well, and a vein of almost uncanny originality. He has seen drama where few other playwrights have been able to discern it. He has not devised 'plots': he has discovered stories in character. And he has brought to his writing an almost flawless technique, originated by instinct, and developed by long practice and study.

His range has been wide. He deals with the life of London, which has been his home in recent years, as penetratingly as with the humblest folk of his beloved Lancashire. He writes as convincingly of the Elizabethan period as of the present. He lays his scenes with equal felicity in Sherwood Forest, in a fashionable apartment, or in Lancashire cottages. Whatever his characters, he discovers the fundamental humanity which is their greatest common divisor, and the result is straightforward drama, free of artificiality, devoid of unnatural turns and twists, but emotionally moving.

Had he created in terms of tragedy recognition would probably have come to him sooner. When a tale is founded on death, disaster, and unhappiness its episodes possess such weight that they are striking in their own right, and the author who deals with them is likely to be taken as seriously as his subject matter. But Brighouse preferred to write comedy, and his perfectly natural happy endings have diverted attention from his depth and subtlety. The play which is merely true, penetrating, and charming is considered so lightly when compared with the work which brings death to its characters!

But even the unobtrusiveness of Brighouse's art has not prevented *Hobson's Choice*, a full-length comedy, from winning success on both sides of the Atlantic, and *Lonesome-like*, one of his typically original one-acts, has become Little Theatre classic.

It is worth pausing to consider the latter play. Sam Horrocks is lonely. He is diffident, being aware of his limitations, and it may call for more courage than he possesses to propose to the young woman of his choice. He has little to offer, and he knows it.

It may sound startling, but this is the first of several points which the thoroughgoing Chekhovian would mark for a final curtain. The action may be made complete. With only a word between himself and happiness, let Sam never speak it. Let him remain unhappy, wondering to the end of his life whether or not the girl would have rejected him, deciding one way one day, another another day, but never daring to put his fortune to the test. Let circumstances be too much for him.

Thus the Chekhovian; but de Maupassant and Benavente have gone further. Years later, when both are in the seventies, the old man, meeting the old woman, might embolden himself to inquire, "If I had asked, what would you have answered?" and the woman, in Benavente and in de Maupassant, murmurs, "I should have replied 'Yes,' " and the curtain falls on a second instant of tragic frustration.

Brighouse's people, however, are never frustrates. Sam pops the question, and is given an emphatic negative. We discern another place for a Chekhovian curtain, followed, if we please to play with the theme, by years of spoken or unspoken regrets—this time for the girl. Any method, however, carried to extremes falls into error, and the Chekhovian technique in this instance would rely upon the naïve assumption that marriage is happiness, and its failure to occur disastrous.

How much simpler, profounder, and better from the psychological standpoint is Brighouse's own treatment! Sam Horrocks is turned down, but his seeking for a mate has been motivated exclusively by loneliness. The sexual urge has not entered at all. With a logic so direct that it has not occurred to other writers, Sam re-enters. There is another

woman: Sarah Ormerod, old, decrepit, and destined for the poorhouse. Will she accept Sam for a son, as he is willing to accept her as a mother? The proposal is so extraordinary that Sarah does not quite know what to make of it at first, but Sam is serious, obedient to the impulses of his nature and ignorant of the frustrationist school of dramaturgy. He convinces her. She accepts. "He kisses her and lifts her in his arms." He goes out through the door, carrying her back to his own home. And *now* the curtain.

It is that searching, exploring logic that characterizes Brighouse's more than fifty plays. His people move towards their goals. They are deflected. They keep on moving. They are deflected again and again. They keep on moving, not necessarily towards the particular destinations which were visible when they set out, but in the general direction imposed upon them by the motion itself, and they find the satisfaction which arises from fulfilling the inner laws that control their beings. Man is a mechanism, and he reaches happiness not by heeding dramatic device, but by being true to himself.

In a larger sense Brighouse's philosophy is that of his countrymen. The Briton is neither a frustrate nor is he emotionally unstable. He persists. He blunders—and admits it. He faces unexpected obstacles. Yet "it is dogged that does it," and he "muddles through." Frequently he fails to reach his original goal. He is not dismayed. He continues his efforts until he reaches some goal, possibly not the most desirable, but the best to be found in a world which needs to be conquered anew daily and hourly, and which denies its rewards to all save the most stubborn combatants.

*Smoke-Screens* is a quiet play, tightly and economically written. Its technical problem is far from simple, for Brighouse, always suggesting more than he openly states, limits his characters to the four women whose interests in Primrose's engagement are the greatest.

Primrose and Lucy have reticences which they conceal under put-on exteriors: the 'smoke-screens' of the title. Primrose needs to speak to her mother. Though she addresses her by her Christian name, and behaves generally like an excessively modern young woman, she delegates to a friend the task of breaking the news of her engagement. The friend fails, and Primrose manages to express herself only when lying on the settee, staring at the ceiling, so that "I won't be able to see your face." Lucy has even more reticences. With elaborate nonchalance she explains to her daughter—who would see through her were she herself not agitated at the moment—that her own preoccupations mean more to her than her daughter's marriage.

Both are candid with themselves—there the smoke-screens are not needed—and their diagnoses are acute. Primrose is "a marrying woman." Her John has "an ugly mug," he may be "a happy accident," but he makes her "all goo-goo at the entrails." She proposes to do what her nature tells her to, following the example set by her mother, and with the full realization that like her she may be making a mistake.

Lucy characterizes herself in a line—a typically Brighousian line: "Scratch a mother and find—well, find a mother." A paraphrase of that line might stand as an epitome of his entire body of work: "Scratch a man and find—a man."

*England*

SMOKE-SCREENS

A COMEDY

By HAROLD BRIGHOUSE

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## CHARACTERS,

PRIMROSE ASTON  
SUSAN MERRIDEW, *her aunt*  
LUCY ASTON, *her mother*  
CLARICE, *her friend*

TIME: *The present*

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## SMOKE-SCREENS

*Mrs Aston's sitting-room in a Kensington flat. It is a woman's room, exhibiting no sign of masculine use, but, of course, that old theory that women don't care about comfort for themselves, but only for men, is thoroughly out-of-date. This is a comfortable, bright, lived-in room, furnished in charming good taste by a woman who, if not precisely wealthy, has not had to watch pennies when she decorated her sitting-room. The door is at the centre, opening on a hall. The window is at right, with curtains drawn. It isn't a bookish room, and the contents of the bookcase, at the right of centre, are obviously novels, and not enough of them to fill the shelves. A table, down right, has "Vogue" and "The Tatler," together with cigarette-box, ash-trays, and match-holders. The principal furnishing of the left wall is a cabinet gramophone and a small occasional table with a vase of flowers. A large settee is set diagonally down stage from left below the gramophone to the centre. There are upholstered chairs with bright covers, and a pouf which is down centre. The walls are modern, and, as modern painters know to their cost, modern walls don't call for pictures. The sconces of the electric lights are decorative on the walls; a standard-lamp helps, by its shade, to decorate the room. There is a mirror on the wall at left of centre.*

*As the curtain rises, Susan, who is fifty, selects a record and starts "The Ride of the Valkyrie" on the gramophone. Then she goes to the bookcase, looking for a novel, inspecting one or two title-pages. The door opens violently, and it isn't closed, either, after Primrose, who—she's twenty—dashes in with her cloak on and begins a vehement search of the room. Susan's action might excite suspicion, though it doesn't. She turns off the gramophone and reaches a chair with evident relief, taking a novel with her.*

PRIMROSE. You needn't turn that off for me.

SUSAN. You're giving so good an imitation of a wind-maiden yourself that——

PRIMROSE. Never mind, Aunt Susan. I'll be out in a minute. At least, I will if I can find that bag of mine. It's got my one and only lipstick in it.

SUSAN [*in armchair left of the table*]. You couldn't go out without that.

[*As Primrose's back is conveniently turned she here exhibits the bag, then hides it again.*]

PRIMROSE. Go out naked? No, you may not think it, my dear, but I do pay some attention to the respectabilities. [*At centre, surveying the room*] Oh, where is that——?

[*She pauses, as if planning a campaign of search, and we notice her, in kindness to Susan, shutting her mouth tightly on a flow of very lively oaths.*]

SUSAN. You're out a great deal, Primrose.

PRIMROSE. Yes, I use London. [*Moving about, up-ending settee cushions in her search*] Can't imagine how you can come up from the country and sit still when you get here. You can read novels at Little Crampton.

SUSAN. I've a slight headache this evening.

PRIMROSE [*casually*]. Sorry.

SUSAN. You're not very sympathetic, my dear.

PRIMROSE. Personally I think minor ailments are the only true impropriety.

SUSAN. I should like a chance to talk to you. Couldn't you, now——

PRIMROSE. I'm afraid this isn't my evening for listening to the conversation of my aunt.

SUSAN [*suavely*]. We might make an appointment.

PRIMROSE. For what?

SUSAN. For our talk. Some time when our engagements permit. Could you suggest a convenient date?

PRIMROSE. I couldn't at the moment.

SUSAN. Won't you indulge me? I very much want just half an hour alone with you.

SMOKE-SCREENS

[*Primrose interrupts her search and sits down on the right arm of the settee, looking down at Susan, dominating her.*]

PRIMROSE. I know you do. You've been here for a week, now, haven't you?

SUSAN. Yes.

PRIMROSE. You had about two looks at me, gasped in horror, and ever since you've been manœuvring for a chance to tell me what you think about me. Am I right?

SUSAN. You're not absolutely wrong.

PRIMROSE [*rising*]. All right, Aunt. You shall have your talk. Not now——

SUSAN. Why not now?

PRIMROSE [*centre*]. Some time before you go home you can unleash your views of me. But not now. Not till I know you've thought over something I'm going to tell you.

SUSAN. Yes?

PRIMROSE. It isn't . . . it isn't particularly easy to be me. That's all, if you'll just think that over before we discuss my young life. [*She crosses to cigarette-box on table at right and lights a cigarette.*] Putrid things, these cigarettes of Mother's. They cost a fortune, and taste like all the sins of Asia.

SUSAN. Is that why you smoke them?

PRIMROSE. I must smoke something, mustn't I? Don't say you don't see the necessity. It's crude. I'm smoking this, my dear, because I've a packet of Player's in my bag and my bag's vanished. [*Lucy enters, closing the door. She is forty, handsome, capable.*] Have you seen it, Lucy? My bag.

LUCY. No.

PRIMROSE. Oh, gosh, I shall throw a temperament in a minute!

SUSAN. Will that find your bag?

PRIMROSE. It might explode something. My bag might be found in the ruins. You never know.

LUCY [*sitting on downstage end of settee*]. You do lose things, Primrose. I don't suppose you've noticed, but the habit of dropping things about is growing on you.

HAROLD BRIGHOUSE

PRIMROSE [*startled*]. Is that true? Really?

LUCY. It seems to worry you.

PRIMROSE [*centre*]. Well, it indicates a state of mind. I mean, a girl can lose her reputation, and no harm's done.

SUSAN [*outraged*]. Oh, Primrose!

PRIMROSE. See Shakespeare on reputations, Aunt. Blowing bubbles. But losing a handbag's serious. All my girlish secrets are in that bag, and about three pounds cash.

[*She moves up as if to recommence her search.*]

SUSAN. Then you'd better stay at home till you find it.

PRIMROSE. Oh? [*She turns and looks at Susan, whose self-consciousness is revealing.*] Oh, that's where it is! My dear Aunt Susan, you do have bright ideas. [*To her*] Will you get up, or must I spill you on the floor? [*Susan produces the bag. Primrose, still retaining her cigarette, uses the lipstick.*] Thank you. Thank you for striking this blow for decency. Now your well-beloved niece need not go naked into the night with lips exposed to the bitter blast and the scandalized eyes of men.

[*She goes up to the door and puts the cigarette in her mouth to free her hand to open it.*]

LUCY. Need you go into the street smoking?

SUSAN. For heaven's sake, child, throw it away! You've said you didn't like it.

[*She rises and goes up to her as if to wrest it from her.*]

PRIMROSE [*coolly ignoring Susan*]. One of yours, Lucy. It tastes like the morning after a bad, bad night in Port Said, but the Government's told us to be economical. It isn't economy to throw away a half-used cigarette. Don't wait up for me. [*Going, then over her shoulder*] A latchkey's one of the contents of a handbag, Aunt Susan. [*She goes out.*]

SUSAN [*returning to her chair and sitting before speaking*]. Is she never at home?

LUCY. Not often.

[*She rises and crosses to cigarette-box on table at right.*]

SUSAN. I told her I'd a headache.

SMOKE-SCREENS

LUCY [*pausing before lighting a cigarette*]. Have you a headache?

SUSAN. No. [*So Lucy lights up.*] But I thought she might offer to stay in if I said I had.

LUCY. Really? Have you noticed much of that angel-child stuff lately?

[*She stands against the table, looking down on Susan.*]

SUSAN. Well, I hope you know where she's going now.

LUCY. You mean she's going to the devil.

SUSAN. I hoped that, as her mother, you'd know which station *en route* to the devil she's calling at to-night. Some night-club, I expect.

LUCY. I'm not in her confidence. Oh, stop looking complacent, Susan! [*She crushes her cigarette out on the ash-tray.*]

SUSAN. I wasn't.

LUCY. Yes, you were. You're the lucky one. You've a husband you can put up with and two sons who haven't turned your hair grey. That's luck, at fifty.

SUSAN [*rising and touching Lucy's arm*]. Don't be bitter, my dear.

LUCY. I've only Primrose, and she——

[*She makes a gesture of hopelessness and crosses to settee.*]

SUSAN. She's going to let me talk to her.

LUCY. Oh? Oh, try anything once! [*She sits on settee.*] But if she won't heed me I . . . well, I'd almost prefer she wouldn't heed you.

[*Susan sits by Lucy on the settee, Lucy downstage and Susan upstage end.*]

SUSAN. Sometimes an outsider's view can——

LUCY. Sometimes I try to take an outside view of myself. I've made a mistake. Somewhere there's a bad mistake, or Primrose——

SUSAN. She's very young, Lucy.

LUCY. Oh, my dear, I know exactly what you think of her! And of me for having let her become——

SUSAN. Lucy, what I think of you is a bit unusual ~~from~~

one sister to another. I think you're a splendid woman. I think you've fought life like a heroine.

LUCY. Thank you, Susan. That's very sweet to hear. But I don't know. Can anyone fight life—successfully? Life's cunning, and it's underhand, and you fight straight yourself, and you fancy you're doing something about it that's rather fine, but life's a crook and fights back crooked. Life's fighting back at me through Primrose.

SUSAN. I've got a difficult thing to say, Lucy.

LUCY. Oh, if we can put our finger on my mistake we needn't butter parsnips.

SUSAN. You see, you spoke just now with bitterness.

LUCY. I've cause for bitterness.

SUSAN. Yes, you've cause, and I'll go further. I feel you haven't the habit of bitterness. That's a compliment, Lucy. Still, habits break down sometimes, and what I want to know is this. It arises out of something Primrose said. I tried to speak to Primrose, and she cut me short. She asked if I thought it was easy to be her.

LUCY. Not easy to be her? She's my heiress.

SUSAN. You've done miracles to make her heiress to anything, let alone—— [*She looks round the room, indicating there's a lot to be heiress to.*] I suppose she knows everything?

LUCY. She knows I had to divorce her father.

SUSAN. She knows you refused alimony?

LUCY. I'd rather have scrubbed floors.

SUSAN. Oh, you did better than that! What had you but a car that you could drive? And you hired it out and drove it. And fifteen years later you own three garages and I don't know how many taxi-cabs. You beat the men at a man's own game.

LUCY. It's easy stuff, beating men. [*Susan rises, goes to the switch by the door and turns the lights out.*] What are you doing?

SUSAN [*in the dark*]. That's all I know about electricity. Turn a switch, and the lights go out. [*Turning the lights up again*] Turn it the other way, and the lights go up.

SMOKE-SCREENS

LUCY. Yes? But——

SUSAN [*coming down centre*]. There's an amazing lot of electricity at work in this house. Your kitchen's a sight. You turn a switch and let electricity do the things that used to make women slaves to household tasks. I think men invented all these gadgets. Men freed you for the career in which you've beaten other men. There's good in men, my dear.

LUCY. But, heavens, Susan, have I ever denied it?

SUSAN. To Primrose?

LUCY. Oh! Are you telling me I let my career bolt with me? I brought up taxi-cabs instead of bringing up my daughter? Is that the idea? Don't forget I had my living and Primrose's living to earn.

SUSAN. You'll admit one thing about Charles.

LUCY [*rising*]. Charles!

SUSAN. You'll admit he was a charming man.

LUCY. In the opinion of so many women he was.

SUSAN. Including Primrose's opinion?

LUCY. What?

SUSAN. One day it became necessary for you to explain to Primrose why she hadn't got a father round the house, as the other girls at school had.

[*Lucy gestures Susan to sit. Susan sits in armchair at right of centre, Lucy sits on pouf.*]

LUCY. I'll tell you what I did do, Susan. I remembered from my own schooldays that schoolgirls are spiteful little beasts. So I made the most tactful inquiries, and Primrose went where I knew there were other girls whose parents had divorced. I did that so that she shouldn't feel unusual.

SUSAN. Good for you! But you told her, of course. And this is what I'm getting at. In telling her did you say Charles was a charming man, if an impossible husband, or did you say that when the split came you loathed him so bitterly that your pride revolted against taking alimony from such a man?

LUCY. I had to justify myself to her. Susan, I had to



make her see that mine wasn't one of those casual, light-hearted divorces.

SUSAN. I wonder if it isn't better to keep divorce light-hearted.

LUCY. Oh, the matter with you is you're in the flippant fifties! You're losing your grip on morals. Susan, do you think I've been such a blithering idiot as to have brought my daughter up in the belief that all men are rotters?

SUSAN. In the belief that her father's a rotter—yes, you have, with the consequence that the child asks herself how much of her father's rotten nature has descended to her, and——

LUCY. He was a rotter. Oh, more fool I to have married him, but I'm not the first or the millionth woman to have been made a fool of by love. And if I was fooled by a rotter what else was I to tell Primrose except that I was fooled by a rotter?

SUSAN. And what's her reaction to that? My mother's a fool. She let herself be fooled by my father, who's a scoundrel. I'm the offspring of a fool and a scoundrel, and I may as well enjoy myself on the way to the devil, because I'm bound to go there, anyhow.

LUCY [*rising, impatiently*]. I'm a fool, am I? Five minutes ago you said I was a heroine.

SUSAN. Heroines are heroines because they don't see side-issues.

LUCY. Primrose is not a side-issue. She's all I've got. Oh, I was a heroine because I turned out to work for my child, and a fool because I turned out to work for my child! You can't have it both ways, Susan. And I couldn't have it both ways, either. I couldn't be a domestic mother to my daughter while I was running a business.

SUSAN. Tell me this. You haven't raved to her against marriage?

LUCY. Rave? I never rave.

SUSAN. Very likely I don't mean all I say.

LUCY. Then you shouldn't say it. Upsetting me like this!

SMOKE-SCREENS

[*She sits at upstage end of settee.*]

SUSAN. My dear, if a young girl's as rude to her aunt as Primrose was to me you can't blame the aunt for feeling sore.

LUCY. You've got to recognize, Susan, that they don't go in for being mannerly to-day. Each generation has its—its technique. This present lot pretends to be a generation of flinty-hearted gold-diggers, and I expect they are shocking to an aunt from the country with two immaculate sons of her own.

SUSAN [*quietly*]. If you're satisfied with Primrose, that's the way to treat me—as a meddling busybody.

LUCY [*looking straight out*]. I don't think anybody's satisfied, ever. We want our children to be our own immortality. They want to be themselves. They want to be left alone to be themselves.

SUSAN. Yes? That's philosophy, and soft at that. I've been speaking about an actual niece with a latchkey in her bag and a cigarette in her lips in the public street, and a talent for back-answers that might be in its right place if she were one of your taxi-cab drivers, but as she isn't, as she's nothing but an over-dressed minx beyond the age when it's decent to spank her for her good, I'm going to try what a bit of old-fashioned common sense will do to her. [*Rising, and saying half quizzically*] For one thing, Lucy, you know what I'm in town for?

LUCY. Well, to visit me.

SUSAN. Yes, with the object of inducing you to leave your money to the International Peace Society.

LUCY. To do what?

SUSAN. It's the greatest cause in the world, and I doubt if you've ever thought of it. [*Seriously*] I doubt if you've ever thought of using the power of the purse over Primrose.

LUCY. Oh, I see!

SUSAN. Well, have you?

LUCY. Have I thought of dangling my will as a threat over Primrose? No! I haven't thought of doing anything so Victorian.

HAROLD BRIGHOUSE

SUSAN. The Victorians had their points.

LUCY. The Victorians had their parents. Security was going to last for ever, so they treated their children harshly when young because they were going to be rich when old. Fitting children for life's battles by making sure nothing they could meet afterwards could be as hellish as what they'd had to meet in childhood. Nothing's secure to-day, so we let them have the best we can while the going's good. Give our children a better time than we had ourselves, and——

SUSAN. I see. Won't discipline her daughter. Just a beautiful, fatuous trust in the innate goodness of human nature.

LUCY. I've been married to Charles Aston. I've also established a business, and I met a lot of human nature while I was doing it. I don't think you can tell me anything about human nature, Susan.

SUSAN. Then what's Primrose? The celestial exception, because you happen to be her mother?

LUCY. Oh, I know, I know! Scratch a mother and find——well, find a mother. I don't know if I'm right or wrong. Honestly, Susan, I don't know if Primrose is a mess, or just a nice kid with a hard modern surface.

SUSAN. Either way she'd stand improving.

LUCY. All right, then, try. Try, only don't blame me if she bites you. *[The door-bell sounds offstage.]*

SUSAN. Oh, I hope that isn't a caller!

*[Her hands go automatically to her hair. Lucy rises and moves up to the door.]*

LUCY. You've got a one-way mind, Susan. I shouldn't object to a change of subject.

*[She goes out to hall, returning in a moment with Clarice. Meantime Susan goes to mirror, smoothing her hair.]*

CLARICE *[chattering nervously]*. Yes, I knew Primrose was out. I wanted to see you, Mrs Aston, if . . .

*[She looks at Susan.]*

LUCY. You know my sister? Mrs Merridew.

*[She closes the door.]*

SMOKE-SCREENS

CLARICE. How do you do? [*Her nervousness increases.*]

LUCY. Cloak off? It's warm in here.

CLARICE. Thank you.

LUCY [*taking her cloak*]. That's a lovely dress.

[*She hangs cloak over chair up right.*]

CLARICE. Yes, it ought to calm me, I know. I mean, thanks awfully for being tactful, Mrs Aston, but I . . . I . . .

LUCY [*putting her on settee*]. Sit down, Clarice.

CLARICE. Thank you.

[*Lucy sits beside her on settee, downstage end.*]

SUSAN [*still standing*]. There's been an accident. Primrose.

CLARICE. Oh, no! At least, no. She isn't lying in broken bits under a car, or anything like that. [*To Lucy, with a sort of desperation*] I wish you'd let me speak about my brother.

[*Susan tries to interrupt. Lucy waves her to sit. Susan sits protestingly in armchair at right of centre.*]

LUCY. Certainly. If you want to speak about your brother you may speak about your brother. I haven't met him, have I?

CLARICE. No. It's rather a shock to meet John. [*Earnestly, as if praising him*] He's ugly. But I mean really, definitely ugly. He's known as the ugliest man in the Rugby football field, and that includes France. I don't know if you've ever seen France play?

LUCY. No.

CLARICE. Nor Scotland? Nor Ireland? Some of the Irishmen aren't pretty.

LUCY [*dryly*]. I imagine International players are chosen for their play.

CLARICE [*with enthusiasm*]. Oh, of course, on the field John's just a hundred and ninety pounds of charging bull. That's where you ought to see him. [*She glances at Susan.*]

SUSAN. The next time I want to see a man who looks like a hundred and ninety pounds of bull I will.

CLARICE. You'll have a treat.

SUSAN. Plainly.

LUCY. Yes; and in what way is the accident that has happened to Primrose connected with your brother? Did he step on her foot?

CLARICE. Oh, no! As a matter of fact, John's given up trying to dance. That's what I'm pointing out, Mrs Aston. He has none of the graces. He's absolutely devoid.

LUCY [*sharply*]. That's quite enough about your brother. Come back to Primrose. You've evidently come to tell me something about her, and if it isn't an accident——

CLARICE. She's as well as I am.

LUCY. I'm relieved. And now we've got that out of you, and now you've warmed up by chatting about this unnecessary brother of yours, perhaps you'll——

CLARICE. Oh, but he isn't unnecessary!

SUSAN. The girl's a fool about her brother.

CLARICE. No, I'm not. Girls are only fools about other girl's brothers.

LUCY. Very well, he's a necessary brother. He plays football remarkably, but——

CLARICE. He does other things than that. I don't think life ought to be all sport, and John doesn't either. He's one of the most successful advertising agents in London. And at his age, too!

LUCY. Oh, I've got it! Now I have got it. Clarice, my dear, I don't see touts out of business hours, and as little as possible in them.

CLARICE. Touts? What's a tout?

LUCY. On this occasion she's an enterprising young lady who puts on her best frock and calls on me to try to get her brother the job of advertising my taxi-cabs.

CLARICE [*hotly, rising*]. If you think I've got a brother who'd ask his sister to do a thing like that——

LUCY. Then you came unasked. All Clarice's own invention.

CLARICE. I did not come unasked.

SMOKE-SCREENS

LUCY. I knew we should get at it. Your brother——

CLARICE. Mrs Aston, my brother's a sportsman. I didn't come unasked, because Primrose asked me to come.

SUSAN [*rising*]. Oh? Oh!

LUCY. What is it, Susan?

SUSAN. Was there any special reason why Primrose asked you to come here and talk about your ugly brother?

CLARICE. Well, he is ugly, Mrs Merridew; there's no getting away from it. Not ugly plus charm. Just downright plumb homely ugliness. He's got a face like the full moon with bristles on the top of it. That's his hair, I mean. He's clean-shaven. He is clean, every way, but if you put a smudge on his nose it might improve it, because then it would be visible.

[*It is to be noted that she glances anxiously at the door.*]

LUCY [*dryly*]. Thank you. You have quite established the salient points about your brother.

CLARICE. You do get it, don't you? About as much charm as a hippopotamus. That's John.

LUCY [*grimly*]. We get it. [*She rises and remains standing down left.*] Now, Clarice, why?

CLARICE. Why? Well, that's how God made him. And no beauty parlour could do anything about a case like John's. They really couldn't.

SUSAN [*going to her*]. Oh, I could shake you! When my sister asked "Why?" she meant—— [*Enter Primrose.*]

CLARICE. Thank God! [*She escapes from Susan.*]

PRIMROSE. How far have you got?

CLARICE [*sinking on to the pouf*]. Drowning, my child. Just going down for the third time in ten feet of water.

SUSAN [*icily, sitting erect in armchair at right of centre*]. What your friend has been doing, Primrose, is to paint with a wealth of offensive detail the repellent picture of her odious brother.

PRIMROSE [*laying a hand on Clarice's shoulder*]. Thank you, my angel. Yes, he's a lout. He's a lamb, but he is a lout.

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SUSAN. She said he's a bull.

PRIMROSE [*looking at Lucy*]. I'm going to marry him.

[*There is a slight pause. Susan grips the arms of her chair.*]

LUCY. My dear, that's—— [*She stops short.*]

CLARICE [*rising*]. I'd better drop out now.

PRIMROSE. Thanks, angel. You've done your bit. [*As Clarice goes up*] Don't go too far away.

[*Clarice nods, gets her cloak, and goes out.*]

LUCY [*watching her go, then with a half-smile*]. Do I say, "This is so sudden!"?

PRIMROSE. I don't care, Lucy. Oh, I know what it means to talk about marriage in this house! It's like talking about something decent people don't mention.

SUSAN [*to Lucy*]. I see. You have been bitter about it.

PRIMROSE [*ignoring Susan*]. I've been forced to give a lot of thought lately to the subject of marriage. I don't mind telling you I think marriage is a jolly fine institution.

LUCY. This brother of Clarice's——

PRIMROSE. Of course. I don't mean marriage in general. I mean marriage with John. He makes me go all goo-goo at the entrails.

SUSAN. What an expression!

PRIMROSE. Love's an expressive thing. He hits me where I matter. That's love.

[*Lucy sits on the settee. For the moment she is content that Susan shall distract Primrose's attention.*]

SUSAN. I can excuse a good deal in a girl who is evidently emotionally disturbed, but——

PRIMROSE. By the way, I'm sorry I was rude to you before I went out. I had to be.

SUSAN. Had to!

PRIMROSE. Well, you're not quite a fool, Aunt.

[*She leans against the upstage arm of the settee.*]

SUSAN [*humorously*]. Dear me!

PRIMROSE. You were watching, and I didn't want to be watched. The cuttlefish, isn't it?

SMOKE-SCREENS

SUSAN. The . . . is it? I'm getting confused with so much animal kingdom. Lambs and bulls, and now——

PRIMROSE. The one that squirts out a flood of ink to hide it from attack. Like a smoke-screen. But I did realize I was being a pig.

SUSAN. Now a pig!

PRIMROSE. I was piggish about your headache. I'm sorry, and when I got out I saw we couldn't go on. I saw I absolutely had to have it out with Lucy about John, and so——

[*Lucy looks at Susan.*]

SUSAN. Shall I go?

LUCY. Please, Susan.

[*Susan rises, goes to the door, then turns.*]

SUSAN. Try to be kind to each other.

[*Susan goes out. There is a pause. They look at each other. Then, tentatively, Primrose hums a few bars of the "Wedding March."*]

LUCY. That's childish, Primrose.

PRIMROSE. Is it? [*She looks at gramophone, goes to it and turns it on. It resumes "The Ride of the Valkyrie."*] Is that stormy enough?

LUCY [*rising*]. Please! We needn't say this with music. [*Primrose turns off the gramophone. Lucy looks straight out.*] Like something leaping on me. Something out of the dark.

PRIMROSE. No, Lucy, no! Things can be sprung on you out of sunshine. Happy things. [*She moves towards her, almost wheedling.*] Oh, I . . . I expect you feel you're awfully young to be a mother-in-law!

LUCY [*with a half-smile*]. Being tactful, are you?

PRIMROSE. No, you are young. But I did think sending Clarice was a fairly good effort in tact.

LUCY. I understand from Clarice that whatever her brother is he isn't on the face of him a lady-killer.

PRIMROSE. He jolly well isn't! I've done my best, Lucy.

LUCY. In what way your best?

PRIMROSE. I've not insulted you. If I'd picked a charming man——



LUCY. Has some one told you your father was charming?

PRIMROSE. Some one? Every one but you. All my life.

LUCY. Oh, the busy talkers! The busy, busy talkers! [*She sits on the pouf, facing down stage.*] Well, what they say is true for once.

PRIMROSE. I'm going to lie down and look at the ceiling. [*She lies on the settee.*] Then I shan't be able to look at your face. [*But the audience will, and Lucy's face, as Primrose proceeds, should be worth watching.*] I admire my mother more than I admire any woman on earth. My mother was once in love with a man called Charles, and I'm in love myself just now. Speaking as a woman in love, I don't see how my mother could have known Charles for what he was. I don't blame Charles, either.

LUCY [*an involuntary interruption*]. What!

PRIMROSE [*continuing evenly*]. Charles was born the way he was. Very likely he knew he wasn't a marrying man. But he met my mother, and of course he loved her, and of course the only way to get her was to marry her, and so he married her. Later she sent him away, and she had me. She had only me. These last weeks have been a tough time for me, because I fell in love, and I think my mother would prefer me to remain unmarried. My mother worked, and I didn't. I haven't the brains. I think I'm like Aunt Susan in one way. I'm a marrying woman. It's tough to be a marrying woman when you've found the man you want to marry, and when you feel your mother's made an independent career that's a living protest against the necessity of marriage. But at least there's this. Are all men alike?

LUCY. What? Oh, no! All men are not alike.

PRIMROSE [*sitting up and putting her feet down on the floor*]. Thanks, Lucy. That's a lot from you. That's an awful lot. I think I know John. I may not know him really, because I'm in love with him. But listen, darling, if I'm making a mistake it's a different mistake from the one you made, because John's as different from Charles as two men can be. He doesn't broadcast charm. He's got an ugly mug.

SMOKE-SCREENS

[*Tenderly*] Of course, his smile is like little ripples in summer sunshine, [*fiercely*] and I'm not being sentimental, either.

LUCY [*not appearing to question it*]. No.

PRIMROSE [*rising and strolling over to the table*]. It was an accident that I fell in love with John. I didn't go man-hunting. But I do say, Lucy, if I'd fallen for—well, for a Charles, you'd have had the right to exert your influence—I mean, every influence. But John's a happy accident.

LUCY [*nodding casually and rising*]. Pass me a cigarette.

PRIMROSE. Yes. [*She gets a cigarette from the box on the table and lights it for her. Lucy watches her yearningly, but before the girl turns she has resumed her mask of indifference.*] They do help when you're churned up, don't they? I've smoked a lot lately.

LUCY [*lightly*]. I'm not churned up.

PRIMROSE [*indignantly*]. Then you ought to be. You said it was something leaping on you out of the dark, anyhow.

LUCY. That was just a first reaction.

PRIMROSE. Perhaps I've been swelled-headed about what I meant to you.

[*Cigarette in mouth, Lucy lightly kicks the pouf towards the armchair right centre. Then she sits in the chair.*]

LUCY [*patting the pouf*]. Come and sit here, Primrose. [*Primrose sits on the pouf.*] It's always a losing game to be a mother. You were a baby, and I lost my baby. Then you were a helpless child, and I lost her too, and gained a school-girl, half of you as dependent as ever you were, the other half a strange new creature with interests that I couldn't watch and share. Then you grew up, a little woman, frightened at first of womanhood, then used to it and confident about it. I'd lost you very far by then, Primrose, but, unlike other lonely mothers with an only child, I had no need to make a tragedy of it. I had my taxi-cabs. I'm not sure, and I wouldn't preach to others the gospel of hard work as the greatest thing in the world, but as you went from me the

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taxi-cabs, for their own sake, for the sake of the career they represented——

PRIMROSE [*rising, trying nicely to hide her disgust*]. They mean more to you than I do?

LUCY [*blowing out smoke before answering*]. They have their uses.

PRIMROSE. I've been an awful ass. Worrying like that. Nearly going barmy because I thought you'd—— Oh, it doesn't matter! [*Slight pause.*] John's here, Lucy. He's in the dining-room, and I expect the poor lamb's sweating himself into a decline because we both thought——

LUCY. I shall be very glad to see your future husband, Primrose.

PRIMROSE. Thanks. I'll bring him.

[*She goes out. Lucy is still sitting. She has a half-smothered impulse to recall Primrose after watching her go, and as the door closes she just lets out:*

LUCY. Prim . . . [*She shakes her head.*] Taxi-cabs! Taxi-cabs, and she believed me! [*Rising*] She believed me. [*She draws smoke fiercely and exhales.*] The smoke-screen! [*Watching the door*] But I'm behind the screen, you John. It's very simple, John. If you're not kind to Primrose I shall shoot you.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

## England

### PHILIP JOHNSON: "THE LOVELY MIRACLE"

PHILIP JOHNSON is among the most produced of the younger British dramatists. In seven years he has turned out four full-length and about twenty one-act plays. As Brighouse is a product of Miss Horniman's Gaiety Theatre in Manchester, so Johnson is a product of William Armstrong's Playhouse in Liverpool, at which most of his plays have been acted.

He writes from Macclesfield, in Cheshire, not far from Liverpool:

I was born in 1900 in a little town called Congleton, but was brought at the age of a few months to this town, where I have lived ever since. It was intended that I should have a commercial career, and after leaving school I did in fact enter my father's business. He owned several stores in the North of England. I stayed in it three years and hated it. At the same time I was writing short stories with no success at all. I never had one printed. Then I wrote a one-act play called *Afternoon*. Incredible as it sounds, this took me six months to write—or, rather, to rewrite, for all my work is written over and over again before I am finally satisfied. It was submitted to the Liverpool Playhouse—and to my astonishment was accepted for production there. Since then I have written many more one-act plays, and in all I have had twelve produced at the Playhouse during the course of the past seven years. My first three-act play was called *Long Shadows*; it was written under the influence of O'Neill, and was very, very serious indeed. It was produced at the Everyman Theatre, London, and was not a success. Then came *Queer Cattle*, a comedy. This was done at Liverpool, and was a great success. It was then produced in London by Mr Basil Dean, and was

a great failure. After this *Lovers' Leap*, another comedy, and once again a great success at the Liverpool Playhouse. Later this was produced in London by Mr Owen Nares at the Vaudeville Theatre, and this time I had a real London success. I have also written a children's play called *Fun While It Lasts*. This too was done at the Playhouse. But I suppose it is as a writer of one-act plays that I am chiefly known.

Johnson and Brighouse offer extreme contrasts. Brighouse, when dealing with the present day, prefers to write of themes which have come out of his personal experience, or which have been suggested to him by direct observation of life. Johnson, eighteen years younger, has been greatly influenced by his wide reading. He seeks a plot, and is often content to produce one by devising a new turn for an action which has figured in many works. Brighouse proceeds from character to deeper character, from the exterior towards the interior. Johnson moves, in nearly every instance, in the opposite direction, from lightly sketched characters to plot. Brighouse is a careful technician, weaving all of his strands into his action, answering his audience's every question with a play that is dramatically complete. Johnson is brilliant, less sensitive to minutiae, guilty of many technical errors, but always an author of good theatre. His plays are sure of their effect, even though too many of them sacrifice logic to bring it about, and, if comedy, tend to terminate in farce, with a weak curtain.

*Afternoon*, his first play, is a one-act in which two well-known themes meet with interesting results. Major Wing thinks that a single sheet of a compromising letter which fell out of a lady's handbag is the property of his modernistic daughter. Wing's wife, whom he has never doubted, enters and claims the bag. It is a terrible moment. Then she explains that the letter, written ten years ago, and forgotten until now, was one jotted down for her to read in an amateur theatrical performance. The husband is satisfied; but the wife's mother remarks, after his departure, "I think I should destroy that letter, Susan." The theatrical effect is so

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excellent that the weak logic of the central situation is not likely to be detected: the wife declares, *before* discovering the forgotten letter in the old bag, "it was specially made to match the crinoline dress I wore in the Conynghams' amateur theatricals." If true, it is an astonishing coincidence; but, if true, it is even more astonishing that Conyngham, the lover, should have written her a long, compromising letter at a time when she was a guest in his house, and when he had every opportunity to speak with her.

*Legend* and *The Good and the Bad* are variants of another theme. In the first a wife and mother expects her drowned husband, an evil character, to return on the anniversary of his death. It is her son who returns. In the second, a more finished and powerful work, Rod, the bad son, survives, and it is Jim, the good son, whose body is carried in on a stretcher, hidden under coats. "Why should the good be taken away," asks the mother, "while the wicked are allowed to flourish?" Rod asks her forgiveness and goes. Jim walks in. The body under the coats is that of Rod. Interesting and effective as the plays are, it is amazing that the author returns to the theme a third time for an even better play, *The Lovely Miracle*, in which, by using what must be compared with a musical inversion, he brings about a conclusion as original as it is appealing. *The Lovely Miracle* is a play whose technique is above criticism. Its writing might be called Barrie-esque, and its central conception reminiscent of *Dear Brutus*, did not Johnson's three earlier plays explain its origin. All four plays pivot, in various manners, on questions of identity. Their kinship with each other is obvious. It is curious that the two last-named should have been first produced on dates less than a week apart.

*World without Men*, *Sad about Europe*, *Shame the Devil*, and *Russian Salad* are farces in which themes not notable for originality are treated with great skill. The women who long for the extinction of masculinity—yet rush after the one man who survives an imaginary holocaust; the "short

and fat" American from Maine, who speaks a dialect derived partially from New York and partially from the Mid-West, and who yields to sentiment and the trickery of an unscrupulous English family to pay twenty-five pounds for a cheap shawl; Miss Georgina Washington, who will lose a legacy if "detected in even the tiniest falsehood during a period of twelve calendar months"; and the wife whose life is so humdrum that she expresses a longing for "something, anything, that would be different, out of the ordinary"—whereupon a Russian prince enters, seeking arrest to protect him against Olga Zomorov, otherwise "the Red Ruin" ("she love to torture"), and Snitz the Terrible, and is followed by those dread pursuers, heavily armed: all of these, the well-informed reader will comment, are not particularly novel, but Johnson's skill extracts a maximum of humour from them. In the first and the last he uses a dream framework. Two years separate their writing, and the conjunction of themes which is lacking in *World without Men* is brought about by an improved technique in *Russian Salad*.

*The Respectable Façade*, dealing with Mrs Walgrove, who returns to live with her two intensely respectable sisters, and who hopes to make herself different by rouging, smoking, and pretending—in vain—that she has not been equally respectable, is one of Johnson's more human works. But while a thoughtful technician would have borne in mind that a force always operates in two directions, and would have brought down the curtain, after exposing Mrs Walgrove's incorrigible respectability, by having one of her sisters inquire, "Do you think I might try a puff at your cigarette?" Johnson sets Mrs Walgrove to trimming dead leaves from plants while singing an Italian aria in a cracked voice, an off-key ending for a play which should be warm throughout.

Johnson's writings show an indisputable gift for the theatre. Any detailed study of them reveals an evolving technique, progressively less interested in plot, and more

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concerned in character. His dialogue is admirable, vivid, witty or charming or forceful, as may be required. In *The Lovely Miracle* he has given us a poignantly beautiful play, full of promise for the future, and in itself a fine achievement.





*England*

THE LOVELY MIRACLE

A PLAY

By PHILIP JOHNSON

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## CHARACTERS'

THE MOTHER

THE DAUGHTER

THE NEIGHBOUR

THE YOUNG MAN

*The scene is the living-room of a humble cottage in the  
countryside of whichever shire the reader loves best.*

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## THE LOVELY MIRACLE

*The room is small and very simply furnished: a square deal table in the centre, flanked on either side by two stiff-backed chairs, several other chairs disposed here and there, and a dresser, upon the shelves of which are pieces of crockery and china. The sloping ceiling and the walls are whitewashed. The fireplace is in the centre of the left wall, and the door giving admittance to the one other room of the ground floor is up right. In the centre of the back wall is another door, and right of this a long, low window. Upon the table a white dress is laid.*

*When the curtain rises the door at the back is wide open, and through this and the window can be seen a prospect of distant hills. It is evening, and the hills, behind which the sun has just set, are deep purple-black against a wide stretch of sky, in which the lovely gold and rose radiance of sunset still lingers. Some of this radiance has stolen into the room, faintly suffusing the walls, softening the harsh lines of the table and chairs.*

*The mother, grey-haired and of slight build, is kneeling on the hearth, engaged in stirring some broth that is simmering in a pot upon the fire. Her dress, though of poor material, is neat and tidy, the skirt half covered by a rough apron.*

*The daughter is standing by the open door, leaning against the lintel, her back to the interior of the room, gazing out across to the line of hills. She is nineteen years of age, tall, slim, pretty, and clad in a very simple frock.*

DAUGHTER [*softly to herself*]. Lovely . . . lovely . . . lovely . . .

MOTHER [*looking up from the broth*]. What's that you're saying? [*The daughter, absorbed in the beauty of the evening, does not hear.*] I'm asking you what you're saying?

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DAUGHTER [*staring, and turning to face her mother*]. Nothing, Mother.

MOTHER. Course you were. It's a habit you've got into just lately—talking to yourself.

DAUGHTER. I'll not be needing to do that in the days to come, will I, Mother? [*Softly*] I'll be talking to him.

MOTHER. Him? Oh, aye. I reckon me and your dad haven't been worth while talking to.

DAUGHTER [*earnestly*]. Yes, you have. [*A pause.*] Only . . . only it'll be different.

MOTHER. Maybe.

DAUGHTER. At the close of every day . . . him and me . . . watching the sun set.

MOTHER. When your man comes home from the fields of a night it'll be a fill of food he'll want. I'd like to see his face when you say, "I haven't got any supper, Jem; but there's a grand sunset outside." A pot o' good broth is worth a deal more to a clemmed man than all the sunsets as ever have been or ever will be. You remember that, my girl.

DAUGHTER. You needn't fear, Mother. I'll look after him.

MOTHER. That's right. So long as his stomach hankers after you I reckon his heart will.

[*She resumes her stirring, and once more her daughter turns her back upon the room and looks out to the darkening hills beyond.*]

DAUGHTER [*after a pause, not turning*]. It's all so beautiful; it makes me feel I want to stretch out my arms and touch it.

MOTHER [*still stirring*]. Touch it? Touch what?

DAUGHTER [*with a gesture*]. This! The beauty of it all!

MOTHER. Silly! How can you touch it!

DAUGHTER. I can't. But I'd like to: I'd like to be able to gather it all to me and hold it for ever and ever.

MOTHER [*ceasing to stir—a trifle impatiently*]. That's nonsensical talk, and well you know it! I'll tell you what's

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wrong with you: you're a deal too fanciful. It's all right to be fanciful when you're a child—all young things are. But they grow out of it as they grow older; and that's just what you've never done. Well, the sooner you set about it the better—that's all I can say. Remember, this time to-morrow you'll be a married woman.

DAUGHTER. Maybe that's why the hills and the sunset and everything seem more beautiful to-night than ever before.

*[The mother is about to make a forcible retort to this, but desists and resumes her stirring. There is silence. Then:]*

There's some one coming across the fields.

MOTHER. Your father? It's too early for him by a good hour.

DAUGHTER. It's a woman. . . . It's our neighbour.

MOTHER *[not particularly pleased]*. Her! What can she be after? I pray to God that little rat of a husband hasn't been on the go again. Always comes to me with her troubles. Not but what I'm sorry for her.

DAUGHTER. Ssh! She's here!

*[She moves away from the door and comes a little way down stage. The neighbour passes the window, then appears in the doorway. She is a stoutish woman of about fifty years of age, wearing a shabby blouse and skirt, and a man's cap upon her head.]*

NEIGHBOUR. Well, now, 'asn't it been a blaze of a day!

MOTHER *[still on her knees]*. Grand!

NEIGHBOUR. The sun at midday would have scorched the bristles off a pig's back.

MOTHER. Folk as don't get their hay in need blame none but themselves.

NEIGHBOUR. That's true enough. They're cutting to-day at Hill Top.

MOTHER. I've heard the machine going.

NEIGHBOUR. An' they'll be leadin' to-morrow at Kester's. They ought to be rare and content, the farmers.

MOTHER. The day I see a contented farmer I'll know it's the end of the world, for sure. But come in an' sit you down.

[*The neighbour comes a little way into the room and addresses the daughter.*]

NEIGHBOUR. And how are you, my dear?

DAUGHTER. All right, thank you.

NEIGHBOUR. A bit fluttersome, I expect. Ah, well, an' who can wonder at it? To-morrow'll be a great day for you. I've not forgot my own wedding-day, an' I never will, neither. Thunder an' lightnin' an' a cloud-burst while we was in church, an' Parson 'avin' to yell at the top of his voice to make 'issel 'eard above the roar of the wind that was tearing round the building. And then later, when we was all sitting down to a bite o' food, the gale whipped the roof off the pigsty. If that weren't a omen I'd like to know what is.

MOTHER. Ah, indeed!

NEIGHBOUR. There were me a-sitting all comfortable-like, when in rushes me father, white as a sheet an' all of a sweat. "Roof's off pigsty," says he, as soon as 'e could speak, "an' the old sow is lyin' dead as a doornail." "Just fancy," says I, not turning a 'air, being too mazed with the idea that I were wed to bother about—— [*She breaks off as she catches sight of a shapeless heap of white silk that is lying on the table.*] Lor' bless us! Is that the wedding-dress?

MOTHER [*rising from the hearth*]. Ay, it's the wedding-dress.

NEIGHBOUR [*approaching the table*]. Well! Well!

DAUGHTER. There's silver lace on the bodice.

NEIGHBOUR. Silver lace! Glory be!

MOTHER. It's a scrap her ladyship gave me when I was in service. I've laid it by these many years, and maybe it's a bit tarnished, but——

DAUGHTER. It's lovely. You should see it when the sun catches it—all glittering and sparkling!

NEIGHBOUR. Let's 'ope the sun'll shine to-morrow, dearie. 'Old it up to yerself and let me see 'ow it looks.

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[*The daughter picks up the frock and holds it against herself. The neighbour steps back, lost in admiration.*] My, but it's elegant; that's what it is, real elegant! I'm thinkin' the eyes of 'm'll be near blinded with look of you when you walk up the church.

DAUGHTER [*with almost childish earnestness*]. Will he think proud of me?

NEIGHBOUR. Aye, that 'e will, I'll be bound.

DAUGHTER. Proud as he was when he won the prize for leaping and jumping?

MOTHER. I should hope so. It's a poor look-out if a man don't set more store by his wife than by lepping and jumping and suchlike.

NEIGHBOUR. I'll warrant he's fit to jump as 'igh as the moon this very minute with the thought of the joy the morrow's going to bring 'im. 'E's a lucky man.

MOTHER. My daughter's a good girl, though I says it as maybe should not.

NEIGHBOUR. An' why should you not? Seems to me that to rear a child up to be decent-living and self-respecting is a thing to be mighty proud of. I'd give a deal to think I'd done as much.

MOTHER. Ah, well; 'twere not to be.

NEIGHBOUR. An' maybe just as well. They'd 'ave 'ad a poor sort of dad I'm thinking.

MOTHER [*significantly*]. Is he . . . ?

NEIGHBOUR [*gloomily*]. Aye.

MOTHER. It's a cruel sadness that things should have turned out like this 'twixt you and him.

NEIGHBOUR [*turning to the daughter*]. An' so you're goin' to live in the little white cottage by the pool?

DAUGHTER [*nodding her head*]. We've been lucky to get it.

MOTHER. It's a tidy little place.

NEIGHBOUR. Pretty, too.

DAUGHTER. Yes . . . pretty.

NEIGHBOUR. That there artist man as was 'ere last



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summer made a right bonny picture of it. Almost as good as a photo it were. -

DAUGHTER. The meadow in front of it goes right down to the edge of the pool; and on one side of the house there's a damson-tree, and on the other a cherry-tree.

NEIGHBOUR. Fancy.

DAUGHTER. I went there this morning . . . very early . . . to look at it.

NEIGHBOUR. Did you now?

DAUGHTER. The sun was barely risen, and there was a mist all about it. It looked kind of not real . . . like a dream.

NEIGHBOUR. I 'ope it don't turn out to be damp.

MOTHER [*suddenly recollecting the pot of broth*]. Lor' bless us! Here I am clacking away and—

*[She rushes to the hearth, lifts the pot off the fire, then hastens out through door at the right. The neighbour sits on chair by table; the daughter stands left of the table, her face turned towards the open doorway. There is a pause; then, as though acting on a sudden impulse, the daughter turns to the neighbour.]*

DAUGHTER [*with some hesitation*]. Would you mind if I asked you a question?

NEIGHBOUR [*good-humouredly*]. Course not. Go on.

DAUGHTER [*blurtng it out*]. It's this—why did you marry your husband?

NEIGHBOUR [*astonished*]. Why did I . . . ?

DAUGHTER. Why did you marry him?

NEIGHBOUR [*confused*]. Why . . . 'cause 'e asked me to, I suppose.

DAUGHTER. But you could have said no.

NEIGHBOUR. I . . . yes . . . I suppose I could 'ave said no—if I'd wanted to.

DAUGHTER. But didn't you want to?

NEIGHBOUR. Want to! And me near pining into my grave wondering whether he would or whether he wouldn't. [*Tittering reminiscently*] 'Ere, I'll tell you something as I've

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never told nobody. [*More titters.*] I went one day over the hills to Flashford, walked every bit o' the way, a'purpose to buy a charm from an old woman as lives there.

DAUGHTER. A charm?

NEIGHBOUR. A love charm she called it.

DAUGHTER. Whatever for?

NEIGHBOUR. I weren't by no means sure of 'im, an' I thought it might spur 'im on.

DAUGHTER. You—you mean to say you really loved him?

NEIGHBOUR. Loved 'im? Ay, I reckon I did.

DAUGHTER. Same as I love Jem?

NEIGHBOUR. An' why not? You don't suppose you're the first girl that's 'ankered after a man, do you?

DAUGHTER. And he . . . was fond of you?

NEIGHBOUR [*nodding her head*]. Aye, that 'e were. I were a good-looker in those days, I can tell you. 'E might 'ave gone a deal farther an' fared a deal worse.

DAUGHTER [*incredulously*]. You and him . . . like me and Jem.

NEIGHBOUR. Pretty much the same, I reckon. [*Becoming almost tenderly reminiscent*] I were a proud girl when we walked under the elms an' through the lanes—me an' 'im.

DAUGHTER. I reckon you felt as if you were living in a kind of a glory, a glory that made the world and everything seem beautiful.

NEIGHBOUR [*sighing*]. That's what it were: a kind of a glory.

DAUGHTER. Because you were in love with one another.

NEIGHBOUR [*sighing again*]. Aye.

DAUGHTER. And now . . .

NEIGHBOUR. Eh?

DAUGHTER. You and him.

[*The mood of tenderness induced by these reminiscences passes from the neighbour in a flash. The lines of her face harden into a mask of vindictive hatred.*]

NEIGHBOUR [*harshly*]. Now, did you say? 'Ot 'ell on

earth, that's what it is! Cat and dog—an' no about it, neither. Blast 'im! Look at that! [*She drags up her sleeve and displays a livid bruise.*] An' that!

[*She is about to bare her bosom, but at a gasp of horror from the daughter she desists.*

DAUGHTER [*sickened*]. Don't! Do<sup>n</sup>'t!

NEIGHBOUR [*sullenly*]. I were only going to show yon what 'e did to me a fortnight since.

DAUGHTER [*faintly*]. I don't want to see it. [*A pause. Then:*] And you walked with him under the elms and thought the world was beautiful. [*She turns her head away and looks out of the open doorway to where the sunset is fading. Then, as though overcome by a sudden weakness, she sits down and faces the neighbour across the table.*] It's terrible! Oh, terrible!

NEIGHBOUR [*not entirely comprehending*]. Terrible? Aye.

DAUGHTER. For two people who have loved to——

[*She shudders.*

NEIGHBOUR. Maybe.

DAUGHTER. All that beauty to fade and wither into ugliness.

NEIGHBOUR. It don't seem right, eh?

DAUGHTER. How did it happen?

NEIGHBOUR. Eh?

DAUGHTER. How did it come about?

NEIGHBOUR. I dunno. Seems as if we kinda drifted into it.

DAUGHTER. Not drink, or—or other women?

NEIGHBOUR. Can't say it were. 'E took 'is drop o' drink, but never overmuch; and there weren't no other women.

DAUGHTER. Just . . . drifted.

NEIGHBOUR. That's it.

DAUGHTER. From loving one another to hating one another.

NEIGHBOUR. Gradual-like. 'Ard to say where the one began and the other left off, so to speak. [*A pause.*] Maybe it's because we expected too much.

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DAUGHTER. What do you mean?

NEIGHBOUR. 'Tisn't easy to explain, but that's what I've thought sometimes. Seems to me it's pretty near always the same with this 'ere falling-in-love business. A young man and a young woman get struck on one another, an' just because o' that they jump to the conclusion it's going to be Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! all the rest o' their days. Later on, when they've been wed a bit, they come to their senses, so to speak, an' find out 'ow mighty wrong they were. Then they start blaming one another . . . an' that's 'ow the trouble begins—leastways, that's 'ow I figure it out.

DAUGHTER. I see.

NEIGHBOUR. When folk is in love it's like as if they can't see things in their ordinary everyday light; they go about as if they was livin' in a sort of 'azy dream. Course, that's all right while it lasts. Only it don't last. It's same as it is with drink—they've got to sober up some time; they've got to waken up out of their dream an' see things an' one another as they really are. Drink leaves an 'eadache, an' love, often as not, an 'eartache.

DAUGHTER [*hesitantly*]. You—you think me and Jem don't see each other as we really are?

NEIGHBOUR. Course you don't. 'Ow can you when you're both of you fair mazed with love?

DAUGHTER. But I do see his faults, even now . . . an' it's kind as if I loved him all the more because of them.

NEIGHBOUR [*gloomily*]. Ah! I dare say. [*A pause.*]

DAUGHTER [*as if to herself*]. If only it could always be as it has been this spring! All the days of my life I'll remember the spring of this year. . . . But there's the summer to come, and then the autumn . . . and then the winter.

NEIGHBOUR. Aye, the winter.

DAUGHTER. Ice on the pool, and the branches of the cherry-tree and the damson-tree all black and bare.

[*She shivers.*]

NEIGHBOUR. You're cold, dearie.

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DAUGHTER. Yes . . . cold.

NEIGHBOUR. Then sit you down by the bit o' fire that's in the 'earth, while I go an' 'ave a word with your mother. [*She rises from her chair and looks compassionately at the daughter.*] An' don't be thinking too much about the winter yet awhile. You've still got your spring; make the most of it while you can.

[*After a hesitating glance at the daughter the neighbour goes out by door up right. The sunset has faded from the sky, leaving it pale and colourless. The room is now full of shadows, in the midst of which sits the daughter, dejected and miserable.*

*From very far away, seeming to come from behind the distant range of hills, there sounds upon the air a faint chord of music. This dies away, and suddenly in the open doorway there appears the figure of the young man. For a moment he stands there very still, silhouetted against the background of evening sky and hills, gazing into the room. He is about nineteen years of age, tall, good-looking, and dressed in the everyday clothes of a country dweller. After a moment's scrutiny of the room and its solitary occupant the young man taps upon the lintel. The daughter, startled, jumps up from her chair and faces him. Seeing him standing there she utters a little gasp of amazement.*

YOUNG MAN [*he has a pleasing voice*]. May I come in?

DAUGHTER [*very confused*]. Oh! I—

YOUNG MAN [*his manners, too, are charming*]. But perhaps you would rather I didn't. I'll go away if you like?

DAUGHTER [*still confused*]. Oh, no—er—please step inside.

YOUNG MAN. Thank you. [*He comes into the room. For a moment neither of them speaks. Then—smiling at her—a little shyly*] I'm afraid I frightened you just now.

DAUGHTER. Oh, no—at least—

YOUNG MAN. But I'm sure I did. I'm very sorry.

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DAUGHTER. Just for a moment I—I thought you were some one else. . . . You're very like some one I know.

YOUNG MAN [*still smiling*]. He must be very good-looking.

DAUGHTER [*quite simply*]. He is—very.

YOUNG MAN. That's nice of you.

DAUGHTER. What do you mean?

YOUNG MAN. Never mind.

[*There is a pause, during which the daughter comes to the conclusion that the young man is a conceited creature—and that he is laughing at her.*]

DAUGHTER [*very matter-of-fact*]. You take the first turn to the right and keep straight on till you come to the row of cottages and the chapel; then you turn to the right again and keep straight on.

YOUNG MAN. I beg your pardon?

DAUGHTER. Or there's a short cut over the fields and through Priestnall's farmyard. I wouldn't go that way, though, in case the dog should be loose.

YOUNG MAN. Dog? Dog?

DAUGHTER [*a trifle irritably*]. You've called to ask the way to the village, haven't you?

YOUNG MAN [*quite at ease*]. Oh, no!

DAUGHTER. Then . . .

YOUNG MAN. Then?

DAUGHTER. Then what *do* you want?

YOUNG MAN. Want? Oh, I don't want anything. [*A pause.*] I—I just happened to be passing this way, and I chanced to glance through your open doorway and saw you sitting here—like this!

[*He sits down in the chair she has recently vacated, throwing himself into an attitude that is a deliberate exaggeration of her own previous posture of dejection.*]

DAUGHTER [*annoyed—coldly*]. You do notice things, don't you?

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YOUNG MAN [*rising*]. Notice things? Oh, yes! I make a point of doing so.

DAUGHTER. Even things which don't particularly concern you!

YOUNG MAN [*complacently*]. Especially those things; they're usually the most interesting.

DAUGHTER [*witheringly*]. Some people might call it poking and prying.

YOUNG MAN. An excellent practice. If the citizens of Troy had done a bit of poking and prying round a big wooden horse they found within their walls one fine night those selfsame walls wouldn't have been knocked to smithereens the next day.

DAUGHTER. I don't know what you're talking about.

YOUNG MAN. Never mind. You will some day.

DAUGHTER. Are you trying to be rude?

YOUNG MAN [*very earnestly*]. Oh, no! Please don't think that! I was only meaning that you'd know a great many things one day that you don't know now. I shall teach you.

DAUGHTER. You!

YOUNG MAN [*still quite at ease*]. Yes. You'll teach me things, too. . . . Oh, a great many things!

DAUGHTER. There are one or two things I could teach you this very minute.

YOUNG MAN [*carelessly*]. I dare say. But I wouldn't bother to start straight away, if I were you. Think of all the time we have in front of us—all the years—you and me.

DAUGHTER. All the years? [*Dazed*] You and me?

YOUNG MAN [*enthusiastically*]. All the beautiful, beautiful years together . . . sitting by the pool, or under the cherry-tree.

DAUGHTER. Under the cherry-tree.

YOUNG MAN. Or the damson-tree—whichever we like best. . . . The cherry-tree will be easiest to climb.

DAUGHTER. Oh!

YOUNG MAN. That's why you'll always be finding me in the branches of the damson-tree. You'll be frightened, and

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call to me to come down at once. Of course I shan't; I shall crawl farther out along the branch—just to tease you, you know.

DAUGHTER [*completely bewildered*]. What—what do you know about cherry-trees and damson-trees?

YOUNG MAN. Almost nothing—except that they look pretty, one on each side of a house, a little white house.

DAUGHTER [*with forced calmness—as if to reassure herself*]. I see—you've been talking to the villagers.

YOUNG MAN [*smiling*]. No, I haven't.

DAUGHTER. Yes, you have: you must have.

YOUNG MAN. I haven't—honestly.

DAUGHTER. But you must have, or how could you know about—I mean, all this nonsense about climbing trees.

YOUNG MAN [*seriously*]. That isn't nonsense: it's the truth, the great and glorious truth!

[*A pause, during which the daughter regards him with growing wonder. He returns her gaze quite unabashed. Then:*

DAUGHTER [*in a low voice—almost a whisper*]. Who are you?

YOUNG MAN [*quietly*]. Don't you know?

DAUGHTER [*moving nearer to him*]. Tell me who you are.

YOUNG MAN. Some one who is very like . . . some one you love.

DAUGHTER [*nearer to him*]. Yes . . . you are like him . . . oh, you are like him.

YOUNG MAN. And you are very beautiful.

DAUGHTER. Tell me who you are.

YOUNG MAN. You are beautiful as the water-lilies on the pool by the little white house. [*He touches her cheek very gently, and as though the touch were wondrous soothing she closes her eyes.*] But you mustn't ask who I am—not yet.

DAUGHTER [*scarcely audible*]. Not yet.

YOUNG MAN [*more matter-of-fact*]. See, sit down here, where you were when I first saw you. [*Like one in a dream, she obeys him.*] And I—I'll sit here at your feet. [*She is*



*sitting on the chair at the table: he on the floor, close beside her.]*  
Now, we're all nice and comfortable—let's talk, shall we?

DAUGHTER [*looking at him*]. What shall we talk about, you and me?

YOUNG MAN. I don't know . . . yes, I do . . . You shall tell me why you were so sad.

DAUGHTER. Sad?

YOUNG MAN. Just now—when I came in.

DAUGHTER [*amazed*]. Do you know, I'd forgotten all about that—just for a moment.

YOUNG MAN. Good!

DAUGHTER. But I was . . . very sad.

YOUNG MAN. Why?

DAUGHTER [*with constraint*]. I can't tell you.

YOUNG MAN. Why not?

DAUGHTER. You wouldn't understand. [*Suddenly becoming acutely conscious of the unconventionality of the situation.*] And in any case I couldn't talk about it to you—a stranger.

[*She makes a movement as though to rise.*

YOUNG MAN [*his hand on her knee, checking the movement*]. Don't let that worry you: strangers can be very helpful at times. [*Persuasively*] And once you've told me we won't be strangers any longer, will we? That will be splendid!

DAUGHTER [*with renewed coldness*]. Will it?

YOUNG MAN. Of course.

DAUGHTER [*with deliberation*]. I'm afraid I can't talk to you any longer. [*She rises.*

YOUNG MAN [*protesting*]. Oh, but——

DAUGHTER [*firmly*]. There are things I have to see to.

YOUNG MAN [*rising*]. You mean you want me to go? [*Woefully*] And just when we were getting along so nicely.

DAUGHTER [*resolute*]. I'm sorry, but——

[*A meaning glance towards the open door.*

YOUNG MAN [*in a wheedling tone*]. Just another five minutes.

DAUGHTER. No! I tell you I have things to see to.

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YOUNG MAN [*pleading*]. Oh, but, please, only five minutes!

DAUGHTER [*her firmness melting a little*]. You say that just like a little boy who doesn't want to go to bed.

YOUNG MAN [*eagerly*]. Let's pretend that's what I am. And you're the tender-hearted mother who loves her little son and says, "Well, just another five minutes—and then, off you go!"

DAUGHTER [*giving in*]. Very well; but not a second longer, mind.

YOUNG MAN. Righto! Let's sit down as we were before. [*They sit as previously.*] Now—tell me a story.

DAUGHTER. A story?

YOUNG MAN. Yes—you know: a fairy-tale. All mothers tell their little boys fairy-tales just before they pack them off to bed.

DAUGHTER. But you're too old.

YOUNG MAN. Nice people are never too old to listen to fairy-tales.

DAUGHTER. And I don't know any.

YOUNG MAN [*persistent*]. Yes, you do.

DAUGHTER. No, really—I—I've forgotten all the old ones.

YOUNG MAN. Then tell me a new one: make it up as you go along.

DAUGHTER. Oh, I couldn't do that: I'm not at all clever.

YOUNG MAN. Have you ever tried?

DAUGHTER. No.

YOUNG MAN. Then how do you know you couldn't? [*Urging her*] Go on, do try.

DAUGHTER [*thinking hard*]. Well . . . let me see . . .

YOUNG MAN. Shall I begin it for you—just to give you a start?

DAUGHTER. Perhaps it would help.

YOUNG MAN. Well, here goes! [*With a gesture*] Once upon a time— There you are!

DAUGHTER. Once upon a time . . . there . . . there . . .

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YOUNG MAN [*prompting her*]. There lived——

DAUGHTER. There lived a princess—or no, let's have her just an ordinary girl, shall we?

YOUNG MAN. All right. Go on!

DAUGHTER. And she was engaged to marry a——

YOUNG MAN. You always say 'betrothed' in fairy-tales.

DAUGHTER. I wish you wouldn't keep interrupting. She was betrothed to a——

YOUNG MAN. A prince?

DAUGHTER. Oh, no: not a prince.

YOUNG MAN. I see: just an ordinary girl betrothed to an ordinary man.

DAUGHTER. Yes. And she was very, very happy.

YOUNG MAN. Good!

DAUGHTER. She used to listen to the singing of the birds and——

YOUNG MAN. What sort of birds were they?

DAUGHTER [*vaguely*]. Oh . . . any sort.

YOUNG MAN. Linnets and bullfinches and nightingales?

DAUGHTER. I dare say; anyhow, she listened to them, and thought she must be the happiest girl in the world.

YOUNG MAN. Where were the birds?

DAUGHTER. I do wish you wouldn't ask so many questions. They were anywhere you like.

YOUNG MAN. In cages?

DAUGHTER. No, not in cages. . . . They . . . they were in a garden.

YOUNG MAN. Oh, she had a garden?

DAUGHTER. Yes, a lovely, lovely garden, full of the most beautiful flowers.

YOUNG MAN. Red, yellow, blue, purple, pink, heliotrope, white.

DAUGHTER. And many other colours.

YOUNG MAN. Had she anything else besides the garden?

DAUGHTER. Let me see . . . yes, she had a beautiful dress, white, and all covered with glittering diamonds.

YOUNG MAN. And she was happy?

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*unable to continue. Rising from her chair, she goes over to the open doorway and stands there, looking out, her back to the interior. The young man has also risen, and stands for a moment silently contemplating her. His manner and bearing have changed from boyishness to compassionate gravity.*

YOUNG MAN [*quietly*]. I want to talk to you.

DAUGHTER [*turning slowly and facing him*]. Well?

YOUNG MAN. Come nearer to me. [*After some hesitation she takes two or three steps towards him.*] Nearer still. [*She moves down until she is quite near and facing him.*] You're not afraid of me, are you?

DAUGHTER. No, I'm not afraid of you.

YOUNG MAN. But supposing it had been some other man who had walked in at that door just now, some other man you had never seen before, coming from you don't know what place, and going to you don't know where, would you not have been afraid of him—a little?

DAUGHTER. Yes . . . a little.

YOUNG MAN. Would you and he have sat as we were sitting just now, while you told him a fairy-story?

DAUGHTER. No, I would not have done that.

YOUNG MAN. And yet . . . with me . . .

DAUGHTER. But he, that other man, would have been a stranger.

YOUNG MAN. Isn't that what I am?

DAUGHTER [*looking at him wonderingly*]. I can't think of you like that.

YOUNG MAN. Can't you?

DAUGHTER. No . . . even when you first came into this room I felt as if . . . as if . . .

YOUNG MAN. Yes?

DAUGHTER. As if you were some one I'd known a very long time.

YOUNG MAN. You felt that?

DAUGHTER. It's so hard to explain, but I seemed to remember the very first day I came to know you.

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YOUNG MAN. Tell me about it.

DAUGHTER. It was one Christmas morning, oh, a very long time ago, when I was a little girl. My father and mother came to my bed and wakened me from sleep and placed a doll in my arms. It was my Christmas gift, they told me. I remember how excited I was, how I laughed and hugged and kissed it, while they stood by, smiling to see me so happy. And then . . .

YOUNG MAN. Yes?

DAUGHTER. They went out of the room and left me alone. All the laughing and the excitement had tired me, so that I lay back on my pillow, very quiet and still. There was no sound in the room; no sound anywhere. Outside the snow was falling. I closed my eyes and clasped the doll to my breast; and at that moment there came to me the most wonderful feeling of peace and contentment, as if—as if the greatest miracle that could ever happen had happened to me. [*A pause.*] And to-night, when I was sitting in that chair, and you were kneeling by my side, it seemed as though the miracle happened to me again, and—[*almost in a whisper*] and as though *you* were the miracle.

[*From very far away, seeming to come from behind the distant hills, there sounds upon the air a faint chord of distant music. The daughter and the young man are silent. Then:*

YOUNG MAN. You were wrong.

DAUGHTER. What do you mean?

YOUNG MAN. I am only the promise of a miracle.

DAUGHTER [*in a whisper*]. Only the promise?

YOUNG MAN [*gently*]. For the real miracle, the glorious fulfilment, you must wait. . . . Put on your pretty white dress and walk once more in your garden. No weeds grow there now; only the flowers, and the birds singing. Go there once more and wait.

DAUGHTER. Wait.

YOUNG MAN. Not for very long; only a little while, and then—the miracle. [*Once again there sounds the faint and*

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*distant chord of music. This time it holds a more insistent note, as though it were a summons.] I must go.*

DAUGHTER. You're leaving me?

YOUNG MAN. I must. But remember—not for very long; only a little while, and then . . .

DAUGHTER. And then . . .

*[He takes her hand in his and together they walk to the open doorway. There they pause, facing one another. He places his hands upon her shoulders, leans towards her, and kisses her.]*

YOUNG MAN. Good night, Mother.

DAUGHTER. Good night, my son.

*[He passes through the doorway and is gone. She stands perfectly still, her face, still tilted upward as when he kissed her, radiant and transfigured with happiness.]*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

## Scotland

### JOE CORRIE: "THE HOOSE O' THE HILL"

THE ultimate object of the Little Theatre, the editor has suggested elsewhere in this volume, is to stimulate local writers so that they may interpret their communities to the world. The history of Joe Corrie is the record of an instance in which the Little Theatre has been conspicuously successful in achieving that object.

He writes of himself:

I am forty years of age. Most of my life was spent in mining towns, and I worked in the coal-mines up till ten years ago. I was a *working* miner, not an official of any kind. Owing to my father being a very delicate man and very often not in a fit condition to work, I was exempted from school at the age of thirteen so that I could work at the pit and help keep the family. A few years later my father died, so I became head of the house, with all its responsibilities.

I think I worked at every manual job there is about a pit, and, being of a discontented nature (so far as manual work was concerned), I shifted quite a lot from shire to shire. It was during the mining troubles of 1926 that I took to writing seriously with a view to getting away from the mines altogether. I contributed short stories and poetry to a few periodicals, but soon found that my best chance of success was with the drama. It was the custom to hold entertainments in the villages in order to raise cash to keep the communal soup kitchens going. We ran a little amateur group, but the plays available didn't suit us: we could speak only our own dialect, and we really were not actors. So I wrote a few little plays to suit the characters (the actual players), and having known them all my life I had them sized up nicely. The plays, mostly comedies, were soon in demand by Scottish groups. My own group made such a success of a mining strike play of mine,

*In Time o' Strife* (dealing with their own lives), that a promoter took them on a tour of the professional theatres in Scotland and they ran for two years. Since then I have taken them out myself for short spells. When the tour is finished they go back to their village—and unemployment. Some of them have since found employment in the mines, and the team has been broken up.

I kept writing plays and short stories and newspaper articles, and at last have found a livelihood. In all I have written about thirty one-act plays and a dozen full-length ones. One, dealing with Robert Burns, the poet, is getting its first production next week in Edinburgh. I have had published over twenty one-act plays, four three-act ones, three books of poetry, and a book of short stories. I have won the Scottish Drama Festival twice in the last three years, which has helped me greatly. Some of my plays have been translated into French, German, and Russian. Quite a few of my comedies have been broadcast (in French) from Radio Paris. I've had two books of short stories published in Russia, and have been there myself at the invitation of the U.S.S.R.

But the point I ought to stress is that I had no other education than the ordinary school. And what I did learn there, apart from reading and writing, did me more harm than good, as I have found most of it, especially the historical part of it, false.

Now, isn't this a boastful letter, but I wish to explain myself as fully as possible for your guidance. Writing was never in our family. I come of ordinary working people who have struggled for generations. How or why it happened I cannot tell. My first call to write came from reading the works of Robert Burns. And when I was free to leave the minefields I came to live here where Burns himself lived. In fact I came here to write this play about him which goes on next week. But I have come to love this part of the country and am going to remain here. I have broadcast once or twice on matters dealing with Burns. Last January I did the broadcast from the cottage where he was born. I like Burns because he was so much of a democrat, and so fearless, and because he was such a sweet singer of songs.

The preceding is a composite letter. The facts stated in



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a first letter were so interesting that the editor wrote Mr Corrie asking whether he had been a working miner or an official, and what had been the extent of his education. The reply was even more interesting, and the editor has taken the liberty of fusing both letters so that they cover the ground without repetitions.

It is difficult to find adjectives strong enough to characterize laws which permit and compel a thirteen-year-old child to leave school and work in a coal-mine to "help keep the family." It is not pleasant to think of any child, let alone one so gifted as Joe Corrie, being thrust underground to work "at every manual job there is about a pit," "frae daylight to dark," as he writes in one of his plays. "The only time they saw daylight was on the Sunday." That Corrie's genius bloomed as it did is a modern miracle. That in ten years he turned out enough work to suffice an ordinary author for a lifetime is another. And that seventeen years of the mines left him untwisted, unwarped, as ready to write of beauty as of the reverse, is still another.

Mr Ramsay MacDonald writes of him:

He carries on the tradition of the Scottish workman poet who sings of a world that is very tender and very bonny, of lasses with love in their eyes and walk, of mothers guarding and bringing up their children, of the hardship of life, and the injustice of how "things are shared"—and whose notes are of the essential music of life, the only sure guide for the social re-creation which is the task of this generation.

His plays are in dialect. It is to be remembered that his first actors knew no other tongue. He began writing about miners because he was one and knew them. Even to-day,

Noo I ha'e broke my fetters and am free  
To lead the life I please, far frae the strife,  
And poverty, and pain, and misery,  
I canna say I'm yet content wi' life.  
Nae pit lums reekin' here, nae hiss o' steam,  
Nae risin' in the mornin's stiff and sair,  
Nae slavin' in a gassy, three-feet scam,  
Hungry and tired, wi' hardly the breath to swear.

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No, that's a' by wi' noo; rise when I like,  
The flo'ers bloom roond my door, the mavis sings;  
But I'm no' happy. Hungry and on strike,  
Battlin' for life, the memory tae me clings,  
And steals awa' my peace, for in the pit  
My auld mates live and slave and battle yet.

His first full-length play, *In Time o' Strife*, deals with the strike of 1926, which started him writing. A realistic, powerful work, it is enlightening to read the verdict of a Scottish dramatic critic who, while admitting its emotional grip, and testifying that it moved its audience to tears, mentions that "there is a good deal of sound philosophy in the play, though it is not meant to be taken too seriously," and fastidiously points out that its humour and its language are "sometimes a little coarse—even to the point of vulgarity, according to the *élite*."

The language of the Scottish coal-mines *is* coarse. It would be less so if children completed their educations before descending into them. But there can be no more subtly suggestive irony than that the coal-miner playwright should be rebuked because his coal-miner characters do not speak the language of the London *salons*.

The coincidences which are to be found in life offer much food for thought. Had Corrie been born twenty years earlier—even ten years earlier—his leap from the estate of coal-miner to that of dramatist would have been impossible. Had there not been "mining troubles" in 1926 it might never have occurred to him to try writing. Had there not been "a little amateur group" close at hand he would have had no opportunity to experiment; and had there not been a flourishing Little Theatre in his country he might have found no profitable outlet for his plays. But there was a series of happy coincidences: he was thirty, not too old to make a radical change in his occupation; the conditions in the mines made him eager to get away from them; there was a local group to encourage him at the outset, and there were many

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Scottish groups ready to act his plays as rapidly as he could write them. He happened to have talent—a final coincidence—but had not every other auspice also been favourable that talent might have remained undiscovered in a coal-mine for the whole of his life.

Corrie's history is one of which he may well be proud; and it is one of which the Little Theatre movement may be even prouder.

Galloway and Wigtown, both referred to in *The Hoose o' the Hill*, are not far from Corrie's home in Ayr. If the detailed action of the play is not to be found among the legends which the descendants of the Covenanters have handed down for two hundred years, then other tales sufficiently near it are plentiful—and the Scots have long memories. But while the play has its value as historical drama its real excellence lies in the power of its characterization, the quality of its rapidly mounting suspense, and the force of its conclusion. It is grim and terrible; but the dialogue draws the characters so convincingly that the logic of their actions may not be questioned.

Its emotional effect is great. It is brought about with the utmost economy of means. That is one test of a true art.



*Scotland*

THE HOOSE O' THE HILL

A DRAMA

By JOE CORRIE

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## CHARACTERS

AGNES FERGUSON  
NAN FERGUSON, *her daughter*  
ROBIN GALBRAITH, *an old man*  
CAPTAIN RAE  
SERGEANT WILSON } *of Lag's Horse*  
TROOPER BROWN }

SCENE: *The kitchen of a shepherd's cottage*

TIME: *About 1700*

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## THE HOOSE O' THE HILL

*The kitchen of a shepherd's cottage amid the grey hills of Galloway, near the Glen of Trool.*

*At the right, back, is a door which leads out into the wild country. In the back wall is a small window through which can be seen the Merrick range of hills in the misty grandeur of gloaming. At the left, back, is another door leading to a byre. At the right there is an old white-wood dresser on which stand two candles. Three chairs and a table occupy the floor, while two old three-legged stools are before the low fireplace at the left in which the peat burns brightly.*

*At the rise of the curtain Agnes, who is sitting in front of the fire, looking very weary, rises and goes to the window. For a brief space she looks out on the scene, then returns and sits at the fire again. She is very restless. Nan, a lass of twenty, tall and strong, enters at the right. She is pale and looks like one who has been weeping or denied sleep. At the sound of the door opening Agnes turns quickly and rises.*

AGNES [*anxiously*]. Nae sign o' him yet, Nan? [*Nan shakes her head despairingly.*] He'll never come hame.

[*She breaks down and buries her head in her hands.*

NAN [*going to comfort her*]. Wheesht, Mither! He micht come hame when the darkness comes doon: the sodgers are scorin' the hills yet.

AGNES. He'll never open the door again, Nan. He's awa'. And tae think he's lyin' oot on the cauld hillside and nae yin near him. . . .

[*She turns away to the left, holding her hands over her eyes. Nan goes to the window and looks out. Agnes recovers, and while she gazes into the fire a proud light enters her eyes.*

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You were mebbe jist a 'herd, Andra, but you hae gane tae your Makar wi' a croon on your heid that *kings'll* never wear, and I'm prood o' ye. [*She straightens herself like a queen.*] Aye, I'm prood o' ye this day. [*Looking up*] And may the curse o' a broken he'rt fa' heavy on the heid o' Lag and every hound that serves under him. [*She turns.*] Licht the can'le, Nan lass, and sit doon at the fire; ye maun be cauld for ye hae lain oot on the bare hillside the hale day.

NAN [*turning*]. My fathr'll come hame; he was ower guid a man tae dee at the hands o' Lag's swine.

[*She takes a candle from the dresser, crosses to the fire to light it, then goes back again.*]

AGNES [*proudly*]. Be prood that ye had a faither wha was prepared tae gie his life for the Covenant. In years tae come when folk are spittin' on the graves o' Lag and his noble kind they'll seek the path up the hill and say tae the hale wide world, "Here lies Andra Ferguson frae the Hoose o' the Hill, a 'herd wha gaed his life for the Covenant." Is that no' something tae be prood o', Nan?

NAN [*at the dresser*]. I'm prood enough tae, Mither, but I'd raiter see him come in the door. Hoo will we spend the lang winter nichts if he disna come hame tae us?

[*It is now nearly dark outside.*]

AGNES. Hang a cloot on the winda, Nan, he'll need a licht nae mair tae guide him frae the hill. [*Nan goes up to the window.*] It's a sair thought, but I'm prood for a' that.

NAN [*turning angrily*]. Hoo can ye be prood, Mither, and him was ay sae guid and kind?

AGNES. He wears the croon, Nan.

NAN. Then God canna hae much cause tae be prood, for He maun be seein' the bluid on the hills, and He's lettin' it gaun on. If He was a guid and a kind God He wad tak' the pairt o' His followers, and no' hae them bein' hunted wi' fire and steel like wild beasts. [*Her speech has some effect on Agnes, for she droops again. Nan looks out of the window. Turning excitedly*] Here's auld Robin Galbraith comin', Mither. He'll hae news o' some kind. [*Agnes remains*]



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*motionless. Nan awaits the coming of Robin anxiously. He enters at the right—an old man, rather bent. He keeps his eyes on the floor. Nan clutches his arm impatiently.]* Where's my faither, Robin?

ROBIN [*to Agnes*]. Agnes. . . .

NAN. Tell me! Tell me! where's my faither?

ROBIN [*unbeeding Nan, and with his eyes on Agnes*]. Puir body, it's a sair weicht that has fa'n on ye, and I'm vexed for ye frae the bottom o' my he'rt. [*Nan, all hope now gone, turns towards the back wall and weeps bitterly.*] Aye, there's no' a he'rt within the sicht o' the Merrick but what is sair this nicht. We a' respected Andra.

AGNES. When will they be bringin' him hame, Robin?

ROBIN. We canna bring him hame, Agnes; we'll need tae bury him on the hill in the deid o' nicht. [*Straightening himself and looking up*] O God, ha'e pity on your faithfu' sons and shield them frae the unbelievers: let nae mair o' them be ta'en, for the hill burns are rinnin' red wi' their bluid!

*[There is a silence, during which can be heard the lonely cry of a whaup and the sobbing of Nan.]*

AGNES. Did he open his mooth ava', Robin?

ROBIN. Never a word, lass, never a single word, though they tortured him gey sair tae tell. [*Agnes hides her eyes as if to shut out the sight.*] "Where is James Renwick?" was their cry. But he tell't them nae mair than the echoes o' the hills where Renwick hides. Syne they put him against a crag and—and—oh, God!—the kindest and the best man in the hale o' Gallowa'. [*He goes to Agnes and puts his hands on her shoulder.*] You'll miss him sairly, Agnes, but ye hae every richt tae be prood, for he was a king. And he wears the mairtyr's croon, lass; what greater honour can a man hae than that. Aye, ayel. . . . But I'll need tae be gaun, guid folk, the redcoats are still in the Glen, and gin I was ower late on the road they micht speir mair than wad be guid for me. Strength tae ye, lass, ye hae a heavy burden tae bear noo, and it's little help ony o' us can gie ye. But the Lord'll strike heavy. "The Lord shall repay," it says in the guid

Book. And we may leive tae see the day. There's never a nicht but I pray for vengeance. And when the day comes may their rotten he'rts be devoured by the carrion, and their souls roast in hell. . . . Guid nicht! And the Lord bless ye baith. *[He goes out at the right.]*

AGNES. Bar the door, Nan, and shut oot the world. It's little comfort it can bring tae us noo. *[Nan puts a cloth over the window and bars the door. Then a commotion is heard outside. Both women are startled. While they stand listening a loud knock comes to the door.]* Wha's there?

CAPTAIN *[off]*. Open the door and spier less questions.

NAN *[terrified]*. It's Lag's men.

*[She retreats to the left. Agnes goes to door and opens it. Robin is thrust in brutally, followed by the Captain, a sergeant, and a trooper. They group themselves at the door.]*

CAPTAIN *[to Agnes]*. Is this ony freen' o' yours?

AGNES. NO, that's auld Robin Galbraith frae the clachan.

CAPTAIN. What has he been dain' here at this time o' the nicht? Come on, noo, oot wi' it, we're no' wantin' ony damned nonsense.

AGNES. He was jist ower seein' us.

CAPTAIN. And dae ye think we're gaun tae believe *that* story? Put that bar in the door, Broon; I think we're on the scent at last. *[To Robin]* Weel, Robin Galbraith, if that's what they ca' ye, what dae ye ken o' this James Renwick wha is keepin' us sae lang amang thae stubborn hills, seekin' ever neuk and crannie like a lot o' fules? Where is he? Oot wi't!

ROBIN. Supposin' ye gaed me a croon o' gold I couldna tell ye.

CAPTAIN. Ye *wadna* tell me, ye mean! But we're no' hain' ony o' this. *[To trooper]* Broon, get a bit o' hot peat oot o' that fire, and we'll see what he has tae say about it.

AGNES. Hae pity, he's an auld man.

CAPTAIN *[to Agnes]*. I'm hain' Renwick in Wigtown

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supposin' I hae tae burn every thatch atween here and Castle Douglas. [*To Robin*] Oot wi't, I tell ye, or I'll burn your e'en oot o' their sockets.

ROBIN. Wi' my hand up tae God I canna tell ye where he is.

CAPTAIN. Isn't this damnable wark? Broon, get me that peat, I say! We'll see wha's tae be maister here.

[*Trooper goes to the fire.*]

AGNES [*to Captain*]. What wad ye say if someyin was tae burn *your* faither's e'en oot o' their sockets? Wad ye no' want tae choke the life oot o' him? This auld man has nae sons tae protect him, naething but his ain auld gnarled hands, and they're no' much guid against three big strong men wi' muskets and steel.

SERGEANT [*as if he just needed the encouragement*]. Very guid, wife! And if there's ony burnin' tae be done somebody else can dae it; I'm hain' nae hand in it.

CAPTAIN. Broon! bring me that peat.

[*Agnes crosses to the right, afraid. There is a slight pause.*]

TROOPER [*defying him*]. I think the same as the sergeant. We've done enough bloody wark for ae day.

CAPTAIN. Ye refuse tae obey orders?

SERGEANT. There's a limit tae this kind o' wark.

CAPTAIN [*to sergeant*]. Dae ye ken the penalty?

SERGEANT. I'm dain' nae mair o' it, penalty or no penalty.

CAPTAIN [*to trooper*]. Broon! obey my orders!

TROOPER. No! I'm gettin' sick o' this kind o' wark efter what has happened the day.

CAPTAIN. Are ye aware there's a hunner guineas at stake, ye nowts? A hunner guineas for the heid o' Renwick, and him no' sae far frae your nose at the meenit? Sergeant!

SERGEANT. Ten hunner guineas wadna pay us for this day's wark.

CAPTAIN. It's Lag's orders that Renwick has tae be landed in Wigtown, deid or alive. And ye ken as weel as I can tell

ye that it wadna gie Lag twa thochts tae swing the three o' us tae the gibbet if he heard o' this carry-on.

SERGEANT. And we'd deserve it if we touched ae hair o' that auld man's heid. It's true what the guid wife says. And I'm mindin' o' my ain faither.

TROOPER. It's Wigtown we should be in at this time o' nicht, onyway. We hae a' God's daylight tae hunt for Renwick.

CAPTAIN. Very weel. But ye haena heard the last o' this. I'll mak' it damned hot for ye yet, mind I'm sayin' it. [*To Robin*] Robin, we'll be ca'in' in at the clachan the morn. Sir Robert Grierson o' Lag'll be wi' us, and he'll be askin' ye himsel' about this Maister Renwick. Sae if ye think it best tae be keepin' your mooth shut ye better devote the hale o' the nicht tae prayer, and prepare tae meet your God. [*To sergeant*] Mebbe you'll oblige me by openin' that door tae let the puir auld innocent sowl oot. [*Sergeant opens door.*] Thank ye! [*To Robin*] There's the door, then, ye auld pig. And mind what I said aboot preparin' tae meet your God. And hae a guid peat fire on: you'll be nane the war o' a taste o' hell afore ye gang tae heaven. [*Robin goes out at the right.* *To trooper*] See him ower the dyke. And see that thae horses are thethered for the nicht. [*To sergeant*] Awa' and gie him a hand. And see that there's plenty o' strae; we'll be sleepin' in that shed the nicht. [*Sergeant and trooper go out at the right.*] A hunner gowden guineas, and mebbe tae lit it slip oot o' oor grasp ower the heid o' twa fules that canna bide oot o' Wigtown for twa nichts on end. But I'm gettin' Renwick! By God, I'm gettin' him, deid or alive. [*To Agnes*] Get a bite o' meat ready, we haena had a bite since midday. [*To Nan*] And you! Get some peats for this fire.

NAN [*angry*]. Wha dae ye think you're talkin' tae?

AGNES [*to Nan*]. Dae as he says, Nan. [*Nan hesitates.*] Like a guid lass.

[*Nan goes out at left, giving the Captain a look of hatred. The Captain sits at the table, centre.*]

CAPTAIN. Is there nae man in this hoose?

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AGNES. No.

CAPTAIN. Deid?

AGNES. Aye.

CAPTAIN [*as Nan enters with peat which she puts on the fire*].  
You'll hae nae whusky in the hoose then?

AGNES [*thoughtfully*]. Whusky!

CAPTAIN. Aye, whusky!

AGNES. Wad ye no' be better wi' something tae eat first?  
[*Nan shows surprise.*]

CAPTAIN. What's that?

AGNES. I'll mak' ye a bite o' meat first.

CAPTAIN. D'ye mean that! Are ye takin' oor visit  
friendly?

AGNES. It's the lang nichts we spend up here, and we'll  
be glad o' your company.

[*Nan is about to rebuke Agnes, but she gets a look that  
makes her hesitate.*]

CAPTAIN. You're no' like the rest o' the folk we hae met  
in Gallowa'. They wad tear oor he'rts oot if they got the  
chance. But mebbe you're no' Covenanters?

AGNES. Did Christ no' say, "Forgie your enemies"?

CAPTAIN. There's no' mony Christians amang the  
Covenanters, then. They're mair bloodthirsty than the *scum*  
o' Lag's troopers. They think nocht o' lyin' ahint dykes  
and shootin' in cauld bluid. Nae wonder we show little  
mercy tae them when we *dae* get them: they hae themsel's  
tae blame for it. No, there's no' mony o' your kind  
hereaboot.

AGNES. There's naebody ever turned awa' frae the Hoose  
o' the Hill.

CAPTAIN. Renwick himsel' mebbe comes here?

AGNES. There's naebody ever turned awa' frae the Hoose  
o' the Hill.

CAPTAIN [*rising*]. Eh!

NAN. Mither!

CAPTAIN. God! This is a stroke o' luck. [*Approaching  
Agnes*] Here, guid wife, I think you and me could strike a

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bargain here the nicht. You'll hae a bit o' a fecht up here tae keep things gaun, seein' there's jist the twa o' ye. And ten or fifteen guineas wadna gang wrang, eh! [*Agnes makes no answer. Nan watches her keenly.*] If I was tae mak' it twenty wad it be nearer tae your likin'? What could ye no' dae wi' twenty guineas, noo? Ye could mak' yoursel's richt for life up here, richt till the end o' your days, guid wife. And naebody wad be ony the wiser. Independent, and nae need tae work frae daylight till dark. What say ye?

NAN [*pleading*]. Mither!

[*Captain looks sharply at Nan, and is sure that he is on the right track; he smiles.*]

CAPTAIN. Twenty gowden guineas in your hand! and nae yin ony the wiser. You'll never get a chance like it in your life again.

NAN. Renwick never comes here.

CAPTAIN. I ken better. And noo that I dae ken I'll get him whether ye help me or no'. Tak' the chance, guid wife, while you're gettin' it. We'll mak' it twenty-five guineas.

AGNES. But he micht no' come here again.

NAN. Mither! for God's sake——

CAPTAIN [*interrupting*]. I'll gie ye the twenty-five guineas and tak' the chance o' that. [*He counts out the money on the table.*] What could ye no' dae wi' that noo? You'll hae nocht tae dae but slip oot tae the shed where we'll be restin' and gie a cannie knock on the door. Dinna be a fule, guid wife.

[*There is a pause.*]

AGNES. I'll dae it.

NAN [*grief-stricken*]. O God, hae mercy on us!

CAPTAIN [*patting Agnes on the shoulder*]. You're nae fule, onyway, I can see that.

AGNES. Are ye ready for your bite o' supper?

CAPTAIN. I am. And I'll enjoy it noo. [*Rubbing his hands*] God, but Lag'll be a prood man when I troop intae Wigtown wi' this Renwick wha had jouked a hunner aulder and wiser men than me. Hah! and tae think that he should

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be trapped as easy. It'll be the laugh o' Wigtown when it comes oot. [*Looking towards the door at the right*] What can be keepin' thae nowts. Ye'd think they had a regiment o' horses tae stable.

[*He goes out at the right, humming a snatch of song.*

NAN [*approaching Agnes, greatly upset*]. Mither, hoo could ye?

AGNES [*whispering*]. Wheesht! say nocht. And dae as they bid ye. The Lord has delivered them intae my hands. Gimme a he'rt o' steel. Gimme strength tae cairry it through.

NAN [*pleading with all her power*]. You'll no' gie Maister Renwick intae their hands, Mither! Ye *canna* dae it. My faither wadna rest in his grave if he kent ye did sich a thing.

AGNES [*hurriedly*]. Hide that money alow the stane at the door. Quick! Get it oot o' sicht afore they come back. And if ye should be left yoursel' in the mornin' speed as fast as ye can tae your uncle John's in New Gallowa'.

NAN. But, Mither, ye *canna* . . .

AGNES [*interrupting wildly*]. Dae as I tell ye, lassie! and ask nae questions. Even *you* *canna* be trusted. [*Nan goes reluctantly to the table, collects the money and goes out. Agnes takes a bottle of whisky from the dresser, and begins setting a meal, laughing a little hysterically. Nan re-enters.*] Let them eat and drink their fill. Lag'll be a prood man, did he say? when he troops intae Wigtown wi' Maister Renwick. Aye, and he'll hae muckle cause tae be prood. Keep your mooth as firm as the rocks, Nan. And if Maister Renwick comes tae the winda betray naething, sit as still as death. Oh, the Lord has been kind tae us, and . . .

[*The Captain returns with his men. Agnes proceeds with the setting of their meal in silence.*

CAPTAIN. Weel, and are ye ready for us noo? Whusky tae! [*Patting Agnes on the shoulder*] There's no' mony o' *your* kind o' Covenanters. [*To sergeant and trooper*] Sit ye doon! though ye dinna deserve a bite for your insubordination.

Lag wadna need tae ken that I was sae saft wi' ye when we're amang the hills, I doot.

SERGEANT. Lag tak's damned guid care that *he* disna spend the nichts amang the hills.

CAPTAIN [*loudly*]. Sit doon!

*[They sit. Sergeant at the right of table, trooper at centre, Captain at the left. They begin to eat. Agnes and Nan both sit at the fire, occupied with their own thoughts. Agnes sits at front.]*

TROOPER. I wonder wha yon man was that we cam' on the day?

SERGEANT. He was a dour yin and nae mistake.

CAPTAIN. Mair meat for the craws. Nae wonder they're sae glossy and black aboot here.

*[Nan has to be held down by Agnes.]*

CAPTAIN [*filling himself a glass of whiskey*]. Here's a short life tae Renwick and a speedy return tae Wigtown. [*He drinks, then fills up a glass for the sergeant.*] Here!

SERGEANT. Hospitality like this, and us gaun aboot the countryside murderin' and plunderin' and levellin' wi' fire! [*To Agnes*] We dinna deserve it, guid wife. Here's tae ye, whae'er ye be!

CAPTAIN. Here! what's becomin' o' ye? Ha! I see ye slinkin' awa' tae a conventicle yet wi' a Bible alow your coat.

TROOPER. Did ye see hoo yon man kissed his Bible the day when we stuck him against the crag? And hoo he looked up tae the sky, syne looked at us and laughed? Yon was courage.

NAN [*who can bear it no longer*]. Aye. [*Rising*] There was mair courage in the he'rt o' him than there is in the hale o' Lag's troopers.

*[Agnes thrusts her to her seat. They stare at Nan. The Captain rises and turns towards her.]*

CAPTAIN. Wha was the stubborn pig that you're sae much concerned aboot him?

AGNES. He was nae freen' o' oors. Nan went aboot his hoose whiles, that's a' we kent o' him.



THE HOOSE O' THE HILL

CAPTAIN. Aweel, you'll ken him nae mair. [*He pauses and looks suspiciously at Agnes. She meets his stare.*] If I thocht there was ony underhand wark gaun on here the nicht I'd lock the door and licht the countryside wi' the flames o' your thatch.

AGNES. Are ye heedin' what a nervous lass has tae say?

CAPTAIN. There's nae yin'll play Captain Rae false and get awa' wi't. [*He looks at her keenly.*] No, I dinna think you're sic a fule as risk that. It's Wigtown the morn wi' Renwick at oor heid. What say ye, guid wife?

SERGEANT. You may catch the fox, Captain, but I'm dootin' if ever you'll catch Renwick.

CAPTAIN. Ha, ha! You wait and see, Sergeant. I haena been sleepin' since we cam' here the nicht. Wait till the morn and see if we troop intae Wigtown emptyhanded.

[*He sits again.*]

SERGEANT. Efter what happened the day it'll no' be the morn nor ony ither morn you'll be troopin' intae Wigtown wi' Renwick. There's as many holes in this pairt as there are rabbits. And every mooth is as ticht as the rocks o' Ben Yellary.

CAPTAIN [*taking another glass of whisky*]. There's sic a thing as a snare, Sergeant.

SERGEANT. Aye, but they hae been set before, Captain, and Renwick's heid's no' in yet. Nor will a' the fire and steel o' the Croon get him, I doot.

CAPTAIN. There are sich things as jinglin' Geordies, Sergeant, and twenty-five o' them are worth a' the fire and steel o' the Croon whiles.

SERGEANT. The man wha gaed his life the day spat on your jinglin' Geordies, didn't he? Na, the day ye troop intae Wigtown wi' Renwick it'll be blue snaw.

CAPTAIN. I'll lay twenty guineas tae five o' yours that I'll hae Renwick in Wigtown jile before sunset the morn.

SERGEANT [*putting his money on the table*]. There ye are! Huh! I wish I could ay mak' twenty guineas as easy.

JOE CORRIE

CAPTAIN [*to trooper*]. You tak' care o' thae Geordies till the morn at sunset.

TROOPER. My faither used tae say that there was naething like a dram for makin' a man throw awa' his siller.

CAPTAIN [*looking at Agnes*]. Them wha tak' me for a fule are makin' a big mistake; d'ye hear that, guid wife? Either Renwick's in Wigtown jile the morn at sunset or there'll be a bleeze on this hill. It disna gie me twa thochts tae set fire tae a thatch.

SERGEANT. Ye better be carefu' wi' the fire, Captain, it has a wey o' spittin' back whiles.

CAPTAIN [*rising in wrath*]. Ye damned pig, if ye insult me, I'll—— [*Sergeant rises and faces him. They stand scowling at each other for a few seconds and then sit. There is a pause. A faint knocking is heard on the window. Agnes clutches Nan's arm. Rising; in a whisper*] What's that?

AGNES [*extra loudly*]. It's only the wind shakin' the rose-bush against the winda. [*They listen cautiously. But the sound is not repeated.*] Get anither bottle oot o' that cupboard, Nan. [*Rising and speaking to the men*] I'll awa' tae the shed and see that ye hae plenty o' strae tae lie doon on.

[*She goes out at the right. Nan gets the bottle.*]

CAPTAIN [*to the men*]. Be damned thankfu' ye hae a captain that disna keep up spite, or ye'd be lyin' amang the heather the nicht wi' naething abune ye but the cauld stars. Though I hae a guid mind no' tae let ye hae a taste oot o' this bottle. [*To Nan*] Will I gie them a dram? Dae ye think they deserve it? You're a bonnie lass tae, when a body gets a guid look at ye. I've seen the day when Captain Rae wad have had a pree at thae red lips afore this. But ah ha! ten years wi' a crabbit wife knocks the thought o' weemin oot the heid. [*Filling up his glass*] Come! Trooper, a sang! And here's tae the eternal damnation o' every Covenanter! [*He drinks.*] A sang! ye damned nowt! Did ye no' hear me speak? Or are ye like oor freen' the sergeant here, half trooper and half Covenanter? A sang!

TROOPER. I'll try it, though my throat's gey dry yet.

THE HOOSE O' THE HILL

[*He rises.*]

CAPTAIN [*filling a glass and handing it to the trooper*]. Here! And wish lang life tae Captain Rae, for you'll miss the best freen' ever ye had in your life when he's awa' frae ye.

TROOPER [*raising his glass*]. Lang life tae Captain Rae.

CAPTAIN. Get it over and get on wi' the sang!

TROOPER [*drinks, and then sings*].

As I was a-walking one morning in May,  
The little birds were singing delightful and gay,  
Where I and my true love would often sport at play,  
Down among the beds o' sweet roses.

CAPTAIN [*drinking*]. Eternal damnation tae every Covenanter!

TROOPER.

If I had gold and silver in bags running o'er,  
I'd part with all my money to the girl I adore,  
I'd part with all my money to meet my girl once more,  
Down among the beds o' sweet roses.

[*Trooper sits down again.*]

CAPTAIN [*singing*]. "Down among the beds o' sweet roses." Sergeant! A sang!

SERGEANT. I hae nae mind for singin' this nicht.

CAPTAIN [*filling a glass and handing it to him*]. Here! A sang!

SERGEANT. I've had plenty.

[*Captain drinks it himself, then rises.*]

CAPTAIN. Captain Rae! A sang! [*He sings.*]

There's cauld kale in Aberdeen,  
And castocks in Strathbogie,  
When ilka lad maun hae his lass,  
Then, fie! gi'e me my coggie.  
My coggie, sirs, my coggie, sirs,  
I wadna want my coggie,  
I wadna gi'e my three gird caup  
For a' the queens o' Bogie.

JOE CORRIE

TROOPER [*clapping hands*]. Hear, hear, Captain!  
CAPTAIN.

There's Johnnie Smith has got a wife,  
That scrimps him o' his coggie,  
If she were mine, upon my life,  
I'd douk her in a bogie.  
My coggie, sirs, my coggie, sirs,  
I wadna want my coggie,  
I wadna gi'e my three gird caup  
For a' the queens o' Bogie.

TROOPER. Damned guid, Captain, damned guid!

CAPTAIN. A dram, a sang, and a bonnie lass! What mair  
can Heaven send doon! Come ower here, my Covenantin'  
beauty. Captain Rae maun hae a pree at thae bonnie red lips  
yet, or he'll no' can sleep the nicht.

[*Nan makes to go outside. He overtakes her, and is  
struggling to kiss her when Agnes enters.*]

AGNES [*sternly*]. Nan! Sit doon! [*To Captain*] And hae  
you nae mair respect for yoursel', a sodger o' the king! It'll  
tak' mair than a cannie knock tae wauken you, I'm thinkin'.

CAPTAIN [*straightening himself*]. Sergeant! To bed! [*Ser-  
geant and trooper go out at the right. To Agnes*] A cannie  
knock! Aye, a cannie knock, and troopin' intae Wigtown  
in the mornin' wi' that fox Renwick. . . . There's some gey  
queer Covenanters. . . . Twenty-five guineas! You'll be  
the lady o' the Glen, eh! If I thocht ye were playin' me  
false I'd—— Look me straicht in the e'en! [*Agnes meets  
his gaze unflinchingly.*] You'll dae. Captain Rae kens  
treachery when he sees it. A cannie knock, and Wigtown  
in the mornin' wi' the fox at oor heid. . . . There are some  
gey queer Covenanters, eh! Ha! ha! ha! [*He goes out at the  
right singing "Beds o' Sweet Roses."*]

AGNES [*quickly and nervously*]. Hoo did my he'rt no' burst  
in my breist tae hear their talk? Nan, gether a' the strae ye  
can get in the byre, and get ready tae cross the hills tae New  
Gallowa'.

THE HOOSE O' THE HILL

NAN. What d'ye mean tae dae, Mither?

AGNES. Did ye no' hear them say that the fire has a wey o' spittin' back whiles?

NAN. But, Mither——

AGNES [*interrupting*]. Dae as I bid ye, lassie! Get me the strae. [*Nan just stands gazing at Agnes.*]

AGNES. Renwick in Wigtown jile! It's three troopers that'll be in hell the morn's mornin'.

NAN. Oh, Mither, ye mauna dae that! [*Agnes takes a small chain from the dresser drawer, goes to the window, and looks out carefully.*] Mither! Mither! ye mauna——

AGNES [*interrupting*]. Wheesht! [*Pause.*] That's them in and the door shut. It's God's will. He has delivered them intae my hands. It'll be a bonnie sicht, the flames leapin' the heicht o' the sky.

[*She steals out with the chain. Nan watches through the window.*]

NAN [*restless and excited*]. She mauna dae it. Lag wad set every thack in the Glen on fire in the mornin' when he kent o' it. Lag's men or no', there'll be somebody waitin' on them comin' hame; they're some mither's sons.

[*Agnes enters; there is a wild fiendish light in her eyes.*]

AGNES. The fire has a wey o' spittin' back, he said. Ha! ha!

NAN [*pleading*]. Mither, ye mauna dae it: they're some mither's sons.

AGNES. Nan, your faither lies cauld and deid on the hill. Wha was it that tore the he'rt oot his breist? *They* had nae pity, and God cries doon for vengeance. [*Pause.*] Wheesht! Naething but the souch o' the water and the cry o' the whaup.

[*She goes out at the left, and re-enters with straw, which she turns over in front of fire to dry well.*]

NAN. It has been a sorry Covenant. O God! is it worth a' the sacrifice? Is it worth a' the bluid and tears that hae been shed? Or are Ye only laughin' at us? Ye maun be or Ye wadna aloo it tae gaun on. Mither! ye mauna dae it!

JOE CORRIE

Their daith-cries wad ring in my ears till my decin' day. No, no, enough o' tears hae been shed, enough o' sorrow has been brought on the world. [*Agnes goes out at the right with the straw. Nan paces the floor. Agnes re-enters. Pleading with her*] Mither! ye mauna——

AGNES [*as if unaware of Nan*]. There are some gey queer Covenanters. Aye, and queerer than ye thocht.

[*She goes to the dresser for a candle.*]

NAN [*following her*]. Lag'll show nae mercy. Hae some thought for the Glen folk!

AGNES. The red flames leapin' the heicht o' the sky! It'll be a bonnie sicht! Ha! ha!

NAN [*madly*]. Hae ye nae he'rt?

[*Agnes makes to go out at the right. Nan holds her. They struggle. The candle goes out. The only light is the red glow of the fire. They struggle in silence. Nan is gradually borne down. She sees that Agnes has gone mad, and she shrinks to a corner, left back. Agnes listens, then lights the candle again at the fire.*]

AGNES [*as she steals out right*]. The red flames the heicht o' the sky! Ha! ha! ha!

[*Nan goes to the window and looks out. There is a silence, then a burst of red flame lights up the window.*]

NAN. Oh, Faither! Faither!

CURTAIN

## *Ireland*

### BERNARD DUFFY: "THE COINER"

BERNARD DUFFY is a present-day *protégé* of the Abbey Theatre of Dublin. Born in Carrickmacross, County Monaghan, and graduated a bachelor of arts from Trinity College, Dublin, in 1907, he began free-lance writing in his student days. The success of his first play, written for a bicentenary celebration at the grammar school he had attended, and of two more written for a dramatic society managed by his brother Vincent in Carrickmacross, encouraged him to give up the legal profession, which he had practised for eight years, so that he might devote more time to writing.

He has had ten one-act and two three-act plays produced by the Abbey Theatre, several of them having been broadcast as well from London, Dublin, and Belfast. He is the author of two novels, *Oriel* and *The Rocky Road*, the first of which was conspicuously successful. In collaboration with J. F. Larchet he wrote *The Spell*, produced at the Theatre Royal, Dublin.

Among his one-act plays are *The Counter-charm*, *Special Pleading*, and *The Old Lady*. He has recently finished a new three-act play, and is at work on two more novels. His aim, he states, is "to present pictures of Irish life which will reflect its humour and pathos without dwelling too much on the sordid side."

*The Coiner*, chosen to represent his work, is in the Synge tradition. Its people are true peasants. Its plot is of the simplest. The playwright intentionally permits the audience to guess the play's conclusion before it arrives, and to wait, in the superior frame of mind so pleasurable to audiences,

## IRELAND

for the characters themselves to fathom it. It is completely unsophisticated; by the same token it is warm and human.

Such a play offers great scope for acting—not histrionism, but honest portrayal of characters true to life in every detail. The more firmly those characters are drawn by the actors the surer the effect of the play.

First produced by the Ulster Players at the Opera House, Belfast, *The Coiner* has become one of the most popular plays in the Abbey Theatre repertory. It was acted by the Abbey Theatre Players during their 1934-35 tour of the United States.



*Ireland*

THE COINER

A COMEDY

By BERNARD DUFFY

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## CHARACTERS

JAMES CANATT, *a small farmer*  
CATHERINE CANATT, *his wife*  
JOHN CANATT, *their son*  
TOM M'CLIPPEN, *a travelling tinker*  
A POLICE SERGEANT

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## THE COINER

*The scene is laid in Canatt's kitchen. The street-door is at the back of the stage, with a window on one side and a dresser on the other. There is a door on the right and an open fireplace on the left. There is a lighted candle on the table and a kettle on the hob. As the curtain goes up Canatt is discovered at the fireplace arranging coals with the tongs in order to nurse a small flame. A prolonged rumble of thunder is heard, followed by a loud tinny crash just outside the door. Canatt starts.*

CANATT. Am dam' but that's a thunderbolt! [*There is a loud knocking at the street-door.*] Can't be, then. Thunderbolts don't knock when they want to get in.

[*The knocking is repeated, and Canatt lays down the tongs, and, going to the door, opens it, revealing M'Clippen standing on the doorstep with a stick in his hand and a sack beside him.*]

CANATT. Well?

M'CLIPPEN. Shockin' night.

CANATT. It is.

M'CLIPPEN. I suppose I can come in?

CANATT. We never keep anyone here.

M'CLIPPEN. I don't want to live all my life with you, but you might give me shelter until the storm blows over. You wouldn't keep a dog out on a night like this.

CANATT. As a matter of fact, I'm after putting out my own dog. But you can come in.

M'CLIPPEN. Thank ye. [*Lifting sack*] I'll take this in too, if you don't mind. [*He enters and places sack and stick against the wall near the door.*] I'm a tinker, and there's tins in that, an' if they got rusty they wouldn't sell, d'ye see?

[*He takes off his hat and shakes the rain off it.*] I've walked twelve miles this blessed day.

CANATT [*with an effort at hospitality, pointing to a chair*]. Maybe you'd like to sit down.

M'CLIPPEN [*sitting down*]. Thank ye. I'm as tired as an ould horse, an' I have a hunger on me that'd do for two.

CANATT. Have you now?

M'CLIPPEN. Divil a lie in it, an', what's worse, I have nothin' to take the edge off it.

CANATT. I'm sorry to say there's not a bit in the house that I could let you have.

M'CLIPPEN. Worse an' worse. We're brothers in misfortune. But it's good of you to be sorry.

CANATT [*explaining*]. When I was finished my own tay the dog took what was left. That's the raison he's outside now.

M'CLIPPEN. Well, well. A kind man is kind to his dog. [*He produces a short black clay pipe and some matches.*] You don't object to smokin', d'ye?

CANATT. Smoke away: I don't mind.

M'CLIPPEN [*dryly*]. Thank ye. [*He tries to strike the matches, but they fail to ignite, and he throws them on the floor in disgust.*] Bad cess to them, they're wet. Could you oblige me with a dry one?

[*Canatt picks up one of the discarded matches and lights it at the candle. He offers it to M'Clippen, who lights his pipe with it.*]

M'CLIPPEN. Thank ye. [*He puffs meditatively.*] I'm just wonderin' now whether it's better to be a full dog out in the storm or an empty tinker within in a house.

CANATT. It'd be a hard question to settle.

M'CLIPPEN. I used to believe that the Irish was noted for their hospitality, but I'm beginning to change my mind.

CANATT. Listen now. There's provisions in that dresser there, an' it's not <sup>my</sup> ~~me~~ heart that prevents me from givin' you a share of them.

M'CLIPPEN. An' what else is doin' it?

THE COINER

CANATT. The wife. She'd nearly know if you had a whiff of the smell of the bacon. If I gave you anything I'd never hear the end of it.

M'CLIPPEN. She must be very thrifty.

CANATT. Thrifty! Man, she'd skin a flea for his hide. I suppose you're not married yourself?

M'CLIPPEN. Ah, no, I'm a lone bachelor.

CANATT [*dryly*]. You don't know what you're missin'. An' you may thank your lucky stars for that.

M'CLIPPEN. Is it as bad as that?

CANATT. Aye, an' worse.

M'CLIPPEN. D'ye mind the song, *The Ould Divil came he to the Man at the Plough*?

CANATT. I do not, then.

M'CLIPPEN. It goes like this. [*He sings.*]

The ould Divil came he to the man at the plough,  
Sayin', "Your scouldin' ould wife I must have now."  
[*Refrain: Ri fol, ri fol, fol de lol lay.*]

CANATT. I'll bet he let the Divil have her.

M'CLIPPEN. He did, my boy, an'— [*He sings.*]

So the Divil he hoisted her up on his back,  
An' off to his kingdom hurried the pack.  
[*Refrain.*]

There were two little divils a-playin' with chains  
Said, "Take her away or she'll dash out our brains."  
[*Refrain.*]

There were two other divils a-playin' at ball  
Said, "Take her away or she'll murder us all."  
[*Refrain.*]

So the Divil he hoisted her up on his back,  
And back to her ould man hurried the pack.  
[*Refrain.*]

Says he, "My good man, here's your ould wife back  
again,

For she wouldn't be kept, not even in hell."

[*Refrain.*]

"For I've been a divil for the most of my life,  
But ne'er was in hell till I met your wife."

[*Refrain.*]

They were seven years goin' and nine comin' back,  
Yet she asked th' ould scrape she'd left in the pot.

[*Refrain.*]

So it's true that the women are worse than the men,  
For even from hell they are sent back again.

[*Refrain.*]

CANATT. That's a true song. But I wouldn't like Catherine to hear you singin' it.

M'CLIPPEN. Where is she now? [*Indicating room door*]  
She's not within, is she?

CANATT. She's down with me son, seein' her sister, an' I don't know what time she'll be back.

M'CLIPPEN. Maybe, then, if we got in some provisions [*taking a bright half-crown from his pocket and spinning it in the air*] we might be able to share them before they'd come in.

CANATT. Bedad, we might.

M'CLIPPEN [*handing him the half-crown*]. Well, take that and see what's the best you can do.

[*Canatt looks curiously at the coin and turns it over in his hand.*]

M'CLIPPEN. D'ye see anything wrong with it?

CANATT. No, except that it looks very new.

M'CLIPPEN [*carelessly*]. It ought to look new. I made six like that last week.

CANATT [*aghast*]. Ye—made—six! Man, if you were caught you'd be transported.

M'CLIPPEN [*complacently*]. No fear of that. That coin will pass any test for silver.

THE COINER

*[Canatt rings it on the table, and then bites it.]*

M'CLIPPEN. If you're doubtin' it ask the people in the shop where you'll get the provisions to test it. Say you're not sure of it.

CANATT. I'll go now. *[He rises and puts on his hat.]* I'll not be long away; the shop is only a few perches down the road.

*[He goes to the street-door, and, removing the key from the inside of the lock, inserts it in the outside. The tinker watches him with a twinkle in his eye.]*

M'CLIPPEN. Are you thinkin' of locking the door on the outside?

CANATT. I am. Some one might drop in and spoil our evenin'.

M'CLIPPEN *[ironically]*. Or I might wander out and lose my little self in the dark.

CANATT *[pointedly]*. Ye might.

M'CLIPPEN. An' I mightn't. You haven't the worth of my good half-crown in the whole caboose.

CANATT. You're mighty polite.

M'CLIPPEN. There's two of us so.

CANATT. Heh! *[Putting on his hat]* I'll not be long.

*[Catherine appears at the door, followed by John.]*

CATHERINE. You'll not be long where?

CANATT *[indicating the tinker]*. Me dear, this is a gentleman—

CATHERINE *[surveying M'Clippen with arms akimbo]*. An' is that a gentleman? Well, now, I'd never have thought it.

M'CLIPPEN *[rising]*. Ma'am, I'm a tinker by profession.

CATHERINE. Well, Mr Tinker, we're not in need of any tins at present.

M'CLIPPEN. I wasn't trying to push trade, ma'am; I only came in for shelter out of the storm.

CATHERINE *[pointedly]*. It's a grand night now.

*[A rumble of thunder is heard.]*

M'CLIPPEN. It sounds like it, ma'am; there's nothing as grand as a thunderstorm.

CANATT. It's no night for any Christian to be out.

CATHERINE [*sharply*]. An' if it's not where were you gallivantin' off to?

CANATT. I was just goin' down to the shop for provisions for this dacent man.

CATHERINE. You had little to do runnin' the penny-boy.

CANATT. He gave me a half-crown.

CATHERINE [*mollified*]. Did he, then! He's very free with his money, I must say.

M'CLIPPEN. Well, ma'am, I have a large empty space where me dinner ought to be, and as I was, so to speak, partakin' of your hospitality I didn't see why you should be out of pocket on my account. So I thought your good man might get something we could share—that is, if I'm not trespassin' too much.

CATHERINE. Ah, sure you're welcome.

CANATT. I suppose I may as well go on to the shop.

JOHN. I'll go, Father.

CATHERINE. Yes, you go, John. You're wet already, an' I don't want to be dryin' two coats instead of one. Get a couple of pound of corned beef, and a loaf, and a pound of sugar. [*Canatt hands the half-crown to John.*]

M'CLIPPEN. An' ask the people in the shop if that's a good half-crown.

JOHN. All right. I'll be back in two shakes of a goat's tail.

[*He goes out. Catherine takes off her shawl and goes over to the fireplace.*]

CATHERINE. Well, I declare! There's the kettle sittin' on the hob, and it may be stone cowl'd. [*To Canatt*] How well you wouldn't think of puttin' it on. Arrah, sure men are the shiftless cratures. [*She puts on the kettle.*]

M'CLIPPEN. They are indeed, ma'am, an' that's what often leaves them shirtless. [*Canatt laughs.*]

CATHERINE [*turning on him*]. What are you laughin' at, you ould omadhaun, when you ought to be takin' in the



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words of this dacent man, that has the experience of the world in him?

M'CLIPPEN. Faith, ma'am, I have little else in me this minute—except hunger.

CATHERINE [*going to the dresser and taking out a bag of tea and placing it on the table near the tinker*]. Ah, sure you'll not be long so. I'll have some nice hot tea ready in a minute.

M'CLIPPEN [*tentatively*]. I suppose you're all teetotallers here?

CANATT [*with an air of resignation*]. We are, indeed: we all have the pledge for life.

M'CLIPPEN [*pityingly*]. Dear me! D'ye tell me that?

CATHERINE. D'ye see anything wrong in takin' the pledge for life?

M'CLIPPEN. Not at all, ma'am, not at all. Every time I take the pledge myself I take it for life. I haven't it at present. But no matter. [*He picks up the tea bag and begins to read from it:*]

“A cup of good tea  
Is acknowledged to be  
A famous restorer in sadness;  
It quickens life's flame,  
And enlivens the frame,  
And infuses a spirit of gladness.”

We'll just see whether it does or not.

[*Catherine bustles about making the tea and arranging plates, knives, etc., on the table.*]

CANATT. It's a wonder to me that you're a travellin' tinker at all when you might be a millionaire if you liked.

M'CLIPPEN. Not much chance of making a million an' me dodgin' the police every minute in the day.

CATHERINE [*placing the teapot on the table*]. An' what causes you to be dodgin' the police, good man?

M'CLIPPEN. I mean I'd have to dodge them if I was makin' too much money.

CATHERINE. Arrah, what would that have to do with them?

CANATT. You see, Catherine, he makes half-crowns.

CATHERINE. Well, what about that?

CANATT. He coins them. He made that one John took to the shop.

CATHERINE [*horrifed*]. Well, I declare! Are you not ashamed to look dacent people in the face after sending out that poor boy to buy provisions with—the wages of sin?

M'CLIPPEN. I've worked out the morality of it long ago. An' it's this——

[*John enters bearing a parcel, which he places on the table.*

JOHN [*handing the money to M'Clippen*]. That's the change.

M'CLIPPEN. An' what did they say in the shop about the half-crown?

JOHN [*taking off his coat and hanging it up to dry*]. They said they wouldn't mind buying half-crowns like them for two-and-fivepence.

M'CLIPPEN [*complacently*]. They'd say the same in the Bank of Ireland.

CATHERINE [*removing paper from parcels*]. Will you have some tea, John? It'll be drawn in a minute.

JOHN. I'm not hungry, Mother.

[*He begins to remove the mud from his boots in a corner.*

M'CLIPPEN. Well, now, as to that question we were discussin' when our young friend came in.

JOHN. What question is that?

CATHERINE. Don't be so curious. Curiosity killed a cat.

JOHN [*nettled*]. I don't care whether it did or not. You needn't treat me like a child.

M'CLIPPEN. Well, then, if you want to know, the question was whether it's right or wrong to coin money.

JOHN. Of course it's wrong.

THE COINER

M'CLIPPEN. There's not so much of the "of course" about it, me fine young fellow. The way I look at it is this: [*to Canatt*] D'ye grow oats?

CANATT. A little.

M'CLIPPEN. Now, supposin' you were to sell that oats to the Government for cavalry horses and you were paid in half-crowns, d'ye think they'd be committin' a sin in givin' them to you?

JOHN. How would that be a sin?

M'CLIPPEN. Do you know that silver costs the Government only one-an'-six an ounce?

CANATT. Is it a fact?

M'CLIPPEN. It is. An' let me tell you that there's only one ounce in two half-crowns. So they only give you ninepence worth of silver for every half-crown.

CANATT. Well, now, aren't they the robbers?

M'CLIPPEN. Not at all: that's their margin of profit for the trouble of coinin' them. It's all a matter of degree. So, you see, if you or me made half-crowns we'd be like the Government, having our margin too. It's only a question of what's a fair margin.

CANATT. There's sense in what you say, sure enough.

JOHN. Aye, but you're not the Government, you know.

M'CLIPPEN. Man, but you're the clever lad to discover that!

JOHN. An' no one else has the right to make half-crowns.

M'CLIPPEN [*as if pained at his lack of intelligence*]. I thought I explained all that.

JOHN. You did—in your own way; but that's not an honest way.

M'CLIPPEN. Are ye castin' reflections on me character?

CANATT. Arrah, don't mind him, he's just a bit foolish.

CATHERINE [*to M'Clippen*]. He thinks he takes after himself, but he doesn't; he's not such a fool as he looks.

M'CLIPPEN. Well, sure, that's some consolation.

JOHN [*angered*]. That's the way always. Every time I

open my mouth in this house the nose is cut off me. An' even the very tramps off the road are encouraged to have a welt at me.

CANATT. If you wouldn't be puttin' in your cutty among the spoons you'd come off safer.

JOHN. Well, then, I'll relieve you of my company.

*[He rises and puts on his coat.]*

CATHERINE. Where are you off to now?

JOHN *[ramming his hat down on his head]*. I'm goin' down to the hall, where I'll have some comfort.

CATHERINE. You'll get your death of cowld puttin' on that damp coat.

JOHN. I don't care tuppence whether I do or not.

*[He goes out and slams the door behind him.]*

M'CLIPPEN. Ah, I don't blame him; he's very young—very young.

*[Catherine begins to pour out the tea.]*

CATHERINE. Draw up to the table now and have your tea.

*[They draw up their chairs and she hands them cups.]*

M'CLIPPEN *[looking into the cup disgustedly]*. Heh!

CATHERINE. Is the tea too strong!

M'CLIPPEN *[sarcastically]*. Strong, ma'am? I could spear a shark in forty fathoms of it!

CATHERINE *[taking the cup]*. I'll put it back in the pot and give it a stir.

*[She does so, and fills M'Clippen's cup again, adding a little milk. M'Clippen eyes the mixture critically.]*

CATHERINE. Maybe you'd like more milk?

M'CLIPPEN. If I'm not deprivin' the cat.

CATHERINE *[with an effort at heartiness]*. There'll be enough for her. She doesn't drink much milk.

M'CLIPPEN. That's not *her* fault, I'm sure.

CATHERINE *[sharply]*. Eh?

M'CLIPPEN *[innocently]*. It's her misfortune, the creature. Sure we all have our misfortunes.

CANATT. You can't have many, anyhow, an' you able to make as much money as you like.

M'CLIPPEN. I only make enough for my needs.

THE COINER

CANATT. How much, now, could you make in a day?

M'CLIPPEN [*as if considering*]. I could make—ah—I could make a fair share. That's not bad corned beef.

CATHERINE. Maybe you'd like some more?

M'CLIPPEN. You can read me very thoughts.

[*Canatt passes him another slice of corned beef.*]

CANATT. I suppose you find it hard to get the material to work with?

M'CLIPPEN. What material—is it tin you mane?

CANATT. No—not tin—the other stuff.

M'CLIPPEN. Oh, that! I can get that any day of the week in—— Have you any more tay in the pot?

CATHERINE [*looking into the pot*]. It's nearly empty. I'll put more water into it.

M'CLIPPEN. Do—an' more tay as well.

[*Catherine fills the pot.*]

CANATT. You were sayin' that you could get the stuff any day in the week in——

M'CLIPPEN. In any shop that keeps it. It's common enough.

CANATT. Common, did you say?

M'CLIPPEN. I did.

CANATT. An' if it's common why doesn't more people make use of it?

M'CLIPPEN. They're like yourself; they'd never think of makin' bright half-crowns with it unless they were tould how to do it by some smart fella.

CATHERINE. Like yourself.

M'CLIPPEN. Spare me blushes.

CANATT. We will. Maybe, now, you'd sell the secret.

M'CLIPPEN. Maybe I would, an' maybe I wouldn't. It depends.

CANATT. It depends on what?

M'CLIPPEN. On who'd ask me, an' what he'd offer.

CANATT. If it was meself now?

M'CLIPPEN. Ah, now you're talkin'. If it was yourself now, as you are so dacent an' so hospitable, I might.

BERNARD DUFFY

CANATT. What will you take?

M'CLIPPEN. Another slice of the corned beef, as you are so pressin'.

CANATT [*passing him the beef*]. I mane for the secret.

[*M'Clippen fills his mouth with food, but does not reply.*]

CANATT [*impatiently*]. I was askin' you what you'd take for the saycret?

M'CLIPPEN [*gulping down his food*]. I heard you; but I mind hearin' one time that it was rude to speak with your mouth full; an' mine was so full that I couldn't speak, even if I wanted to. You were wantin' to know the price of the saycret.

CANATT. I was.

M'CLIPPEN. Well, now, what would you give?

CANATT. I'd give what I think it'd be worth.

M'CLIPPEN. In troth, you wouldn't do any such thing; you wouldn't be let.

CANATT. I'm the master in my own house.

M'CLIPPEN. You're not. It's herself here that wears the trousers.

CATHERINE [*tartly*]. That's none of your business, anyway.

CANATT. As a matter of fact, you ought to give it to me for nothing.

M'CLIPPEN. An' how do you make that out, me ould joker?

CANATT. Because I could tell the police on you.

M'CLIPPEN. Bedad, so you could.

CANATT. An' I might think it me duty to do so.

M'CLIPPEN. Arrah! What good would that do you?

CANATT. It'd aise me conscience.

M'CLIPPEN. It needs aise, I suppose.

CATHERINE. No matter whether it does or not. He could have you locked up if he liked.

M'CLIPPEN. An' what evidence would you have?

CANATT. D'ye think I don't know that you have the materials in the bag?

THE COINER

M'CLIPPEN. Am dam' but you're a cute ould divil.

CANATT. Amn't I right?

M'CLIPPEN. You are right. [*He goes to the sack and takes out a small oblong box. Tapping the box*] Every scrap of evidence is in this, but I'll do away with it before the police sees it.

CANATT [*alarmed*]. What d'ye mane?

M'CLIPPEN. I'll burn the whole box of tricks now before your face, an' if you try to stop me [*he lifts the stick*] I'll open your head with this.

CATHERINE [*pleading*]. Ah, you wouldn't hit an ould man with that.

M'CLIPPEN [*looking at the stick*]. Perhaps I'd better not; I might injure my good stick. [*He drops the stick and lifts the tongs.*] These'll serve me better.

[*A knock is heard at the street-door. M'Clippen lowers the tongs. Catherine goes to the door and opens it, revealing the sergeant.*]

SERGEANT. Good night, Mrs Canatt. Would you mind if I sheltered with you until this shower blows over?

CATHERINE. Come in, an' welcome.

[*The sergeant enters.*]

M'CLIPPEN. Good night, Head Constable.

SERGEANT [*correcting him, but looking pleased*]. Sergeant, me good man. Sergeant—at present.

CATHERINE. Please goodness you won't be long so.

CANATT. Won't you sit down, sergeant, and have a heat at the fire.

[*He pushes a chair forward.*]

SERGEANT [*sitting down*]. It's hardly worth me while, but I may as well take the weight off my legs.

CATHERINE. It's a terrible night for anyone to have to be out.

SERGEANT. Aye, indeed; I was just walkin' down a bit with the patrol when the rain started again.

CANATT. I suppose the men'll have to go to the end of their beat, no matter whether it's wet or dry.

SERGEANT. They will, the unfortunate devils: it's in the

regulations, and it must be done—not that it would make the slightest difference whether they did or not.

M'CLIPPEN. Is trade slack with you, then, sergeant?

SERGEANT. Slack! Nothing ever happens in this part of the country except drunk and disorderlies or carts without lights—there's never a chance of a smart bit of detective work.

CANATT. That's more in your line, sergeant.

SERGEANT. Ah, yes, that's my line—it was it that got me these. [*He taps the stripes on his arm.*] A fella that was obtainin' money under false pretences—sellin' brass watches at a fair an' pretendin' they were gold. I got great praise for that—an' these. [*He taps the stripes again.*]

CATHERINE [*with a malicious glance at M'Clippen*]. I suppose, sergeant, if you had another case like that they'd make you a Head Constable?

SERGEANT. They would, ma'am, I think. Merit sometimes gets to the top, you know.

M'CLIPPEN. *You'd* get the rise; but supposin' there was an informer—a common informer—in the case, what would *he* get?

SERGEANT. He'd get thanks from the bench, and a hell of a time for the rest of his life from his neighbours.

M'CLIPPEN. An' supposin' the informer was mixed up in it himself—if he helped, we'll say, to pass off the goods, knowin' what they were—how would he come off then?

SERGEANT. He'd come off a bit lighter maybe than the other fella—if the other fella got twelve months he might get off with six. The law is very just that way.

M'CLIPPEN. I was thinkin' so.

SERGEANT [*suspiciously*]. Maybe you're thinkin' of informin' on some one yourself?

M'CLIPPEN [*carelessly*]. Me! Oh, no. I have nothin' to inform about. But maybe this dacent man [*he indicates Canatt, who is looking very uncomfortable*] has something he could tell.



THE COINER

CANATT. Arrah, what would I have to inform about?

M'CLIPPEN. Search your conscience, and maybe you'll find something that'll give the sergeant a lift.

CATHERINE. Musha, how would he come across anything like that?

CANATT. How would I, indeed? Me that hardly ever goes a mile from my own house.

SERGEANT. I didn't expect you would. I never expect anything decent in the criminal line down here. [*To Catherine*] Is the rain over, ma'am? [*Catherine looks out.*]

CATHERINE. It's not rainin' a drop now, and the stars are shinin'.

SERGEANT. If so, I'd better be getting back to the barracks. [*He rises and goes to the door.*] Well, good night to you all.

CATHERINE. Good night, sergeant.

CANATT. Good night, an' safe home.

M'CLIPPEN. Good night, sergeant.

[*The sergeant goes out, and Catherine closes the door.*]

M'CLIPPEN [*to Canatt*]. Why didn't you tell him about the coins an' aise your conscience?

CANATT. Ah, sure, I was only joking about tellin' the police.

M'CLIPPEN. I know you're a funny ould fellow, but I think I'd better be on the safe side, and burn the box anyhow. [*He moves towards the fire.*]

CANATT. Don't burn it, an' I'll promise never to tell. Me word is as good as me bond.

M'CLIPPEN. That's not much of a recommendation for either of them.

CANATT. I'll give you ten shillings for it.

M'CLIPPEN. Ten shillings! Why, man, that's only four half-crowns.

CANATT. Well, fifteen.

M'CLIPPEN. That's only six. Make it a sovereign and I'll lave the box with you.

CATHERINE. Don't make a fool of yourself, James. Have no truck with the likes: it's neither good nor lucky.

M'CLIPPEN. The directions an' everything that's wanted is inside. *[He taps the box.]*

CANATT. How much could I make with what's in it?

CATHERINE *[ironically]*. You could make as much as you made out of the false coin the foxy man gave you in the price of the cattle at the fair of 'Cross.

CANATT *[nettled]*. I wish you wouldn't be so fond of castin' up. I admit I was done there, but this is different.

M'CLIPPEN *[rubbing his chin]*. Let me see, now. You could make a couple of hundred like the one I gave you.

CANATT. Well, I'll give you the sovereign if you show me how it's done.

M'CLIPPEN. Hand over the quid and the saycret is yours.

CANATT. If you wait a minute I'll get it in the bedroom.

CATHERINE. You just stay here and I'll get it.

*[She takes a box of matches from the dresser and goes into the room, closing the door behind her. M'Clippen takes from his pocket a piece of paper and a stumpy pencil and sits down at the table to write.]*

M'CLIPPEN. I'm just writin' a few more directions for you.

*[He writes a few words laboriously, following the motion of the pencil with his tongue. Canatt edges nearer to see what he is writing.]*

M'CLIPPEN. You're not entitled to see them until the money is paid.

*[He folds up the paper and quickly inserts it under the lid of the box. Catherine comes out of the room.]*

CATHERINE. There now *[she hands him a coin]*, that's the sovereign.

M'CLIPPEN *[spitting on it for luck and slipping it into his waistcoat pocket]*. More power to you. An' now if you lend

THE COINER

me one of your own half-crowns I'll show you how I make money.

CANATT. There's one within, I think, Catherine.

*[She returns to the room, taking the matches with her again and closing the door.]*

M'CLIPPEN *[standing over the candle at the table and pointing to the fireplace]*: Isn't there a great draught up the chimney?

*[Canatt turns his head to look, and as he does so M'Clippen snuffs out the candle with his fingers.]*

M'CLIPPEN. There's the candle out now. Have you a match?

CANATT *[raising his voice]*. Catherine! Come here with the matches; the candle is out.

CATHERINE *[within]*. All right, I'm comin'.

*[She comes out carrying a lighted candle. The street-door stands open, and the tinker is nowhere to be seen.]*

CANATT. Am dam', but he's gone! *[He rushes to the door and looks out.]* Black as soot! Might as well try to find a flea in an inkbottle.

CATHERINE. Well, aren't you the right ould gom to let him out like that.

CANATT. I never thought he was goin'. *[He sees the box on the table.]* He left us the box, anyway.

CATHERINE. Well, see what's in it, then.

*[Canatt opens the box and disgustedly lifts out a bathbrick.]*

CANATT. A bathbrick, by the mortal potstick!

CATHERINE. Well, I declare. *[She sees the scrap of paper and takes it up.]* What's this? *[She reads.]* "Directions: To make bright half-crowns use the bathbrick and rub hard." Well, if that doesn't take out! I knew he was goin' to trick you all the time an' I just let him—to teach you a lesson. *[She surveys the table.]* Ah, well, sure we had a good tea, the makin's of a breakfast, a bathbrick, and a box that'll hold geraniums out of him, anyhow.

CANATT. It's not much for a sovereign.

BERNARD DUFFY

CATHERINE. D'ye mind the bad sovereign the foxy man passed on you?

CANATT. You don't give me much chance to forget it.

CATHERINE. Well, you can forget it *now*, for that's it the tinker has.

*[Canatt looks at her for a moment in astonishment, and then his face breaks into a smile.]*

CURTAIN

## *Germany*

### THE DRAMA AND THE NAZIS

FEW subjects are of greater interest or of more immediate importance than the technique of dictatorship. The despots of antiquity were often opportunists who wielded the supreme power until overthrown by other opportunists who assembled freely and plotted without hindrance. The larger the territory governed, the longer the time needed to communicate with its outermost marches, and the greater the probability of revolt, a centripetal movement boring inward until it paralysed the nerve-centres. Even Julius Cæsar was merely a busy policeman who was never able to put down a disturbance at one end of his beat without having another break out at the opposite end, and who came to his death at the hands of men who conspired against him while he was absent in Spain and Egypt.

The Middle Ages afford similar examples. Just so long as the central authority was out of touch with its frontiers revolt threatened. When modernity emerged—*via* the French Revolution—it became apparent that a small, by no means united body of men, profiting by the lack of communications which might have aroused a nation against them, could still overturn a kingdom; and when they in turn acceded to power it was a matter of years before their countrymen in the Vendée could be convinced that the Revolution was a fact.

A modern dictatorship is more formidable than any authority of the past. The few weapons which the people are allowed to keep are helpless against bombs, gases, and machine-guns. The dictator remains at home, and reaches his farthest frontier instantaneously by means of an electric

wire. If there is an uprising he stifles it so rapidly and so decisively that the disaffection cannot spread—and no newspaper will be allowed to refer to it. His spies can operate efficiently because the means by which they report to him are completely controlled by him.

The disgruntled citizen, on the other hand, cannot communicate safely with his closest friends. His letters, which he must deposit in the pillar-box nearest his home, and his telephone calls are alike subject to scrutiny. He may print nothing save under Governmental supervision. He may not speak in public—unless he speaks for the Government. There may be millions who feel as he does, but while the central authority can reach them, and can deal with them crushingly, he cannot gather together a dozen without the news coming to the ears of his enemies.

He reads periodicals and newspapers which print what the dictator permits: all others are anathema. The books which are placed in his hands bear the *Nihil obstat* of the administration. The plays he witnesses have been passed on, and found harmless, by his superiors.

When the dictator appears on the cinema screen the citizen stands and salutes. When the dictator speaks over the radio the citizen listens—or goes to a concentration camp. If he has no receiving set he presents himself at the house of the nearest neighbour who has one: the law requires it. When the dictator parades the citizen stands on the kerb—in the posture prescribed by the dictator—and cheers himself hoarse.

He is conscripted into a labour battalion or into the army in the manner and on the day decreed. If there is war he is given the privilege of dying for the dictator—whose portrait leads him into battle,<sup>1</sup> while the worthy himself remains at home. While he is gone he need not worry about the education of his children: they attend schools where they are

<sup>1</sup> The deserts of Abyssinia during the recent war were made less forbidding—one might almost say they were made 'homelike'—by gigantic lithographed likenesses of Mussolini which were erected at strategic points.

taught whatever the dictator wishes them to learn. Eventually even the most recalcitrant citizen makes the best of the bargain, and since years of sham external loyalty are likely to create a genuine internal loyalty the man who began by cursing the tyrant may die with a prayer for him on his lips.

The modern dictatorship has perfected its technique by eliminating the only weakness which has persisted into the present century. It may appear magnanimous—even expedient—to allow minor officials whose fidelity is doubtful to hold over in order to conciliate an opposing party. Ebert permitted it. The various Chancellors whose Governments ended under Von Hindenburg permitted it—and weakened themselves thereby. Hitler made no such mistake. From top to bottom every officeholder is so identified with the administration that he cannot survive its fall. To such a man the success of the party is a matter of his own life or death; and with that clearly understood the use of terror as a means to *Gleichschaltung*—synchronization of national thought and effort—has become inevitable. Bullets speak with a finality which simple argument lacks.

Yet the Germans have made little protest. While many of the clerics and professors have spoken out they have been vastly outnumbered by the rank and file whose love of authority is hereditary. To be told what to do, rather than to make individual decisions; to worship uniforms; to prefix a hundred meaningless titles of respect to the names of all persons above the social status of street-cleaner; to bow, to kneel, to make obeisance; to raise hats, stand at attention, salute; to murmur "*Zu Befehl*"—these are all fundamentals in a national character marked by discipline and by resignation. The citizen has no voice in the formulation of German laws. They are handed down by an authority which is and always has been considered quasi-divine. Disobedience means merciless punishment; but the German does not disobey. If he has exchanged King Log for King Stork it is because the latter has always been his favourite ruler.

The background is to be borne in mind when we approach

the drama under the Nazis. Since 1933 the German author has laboured under a handicap. If he writes lightly his solemn countrymen inquire how it is that the comic side of life interests him at a time so fraught with peril to the world. They wish to laugh, but they cannot forgive the man who makes them do so. If he writes seriously he cannot altogether neglect the surrounding social and political conditions. The slightest departure from orthodoxy, and he is on his way to a concentration camp. Yet the principles of the Nazi party are so fluid, and change with such speed, that a work which mirrors them at a given date is heterodox six months later. Even the Bible of the party, *Mein Kampf*, the autobiography of the Fuehrer himself, is revised by Hitler at each one of the frequent times that a new edition goes to press—and no translation of the unabridged German text has ever been permitted.

It is a dilemma which is real. The German Government was pro-Austrian in 1933, anti-Austrian in 1934, and is frankly opportunist to-day. Strongly pro-Italian at the beginning, it encouraged the publication of anti-Italian works when Italy blocked the *Anschluss*, and dumped into the Spree unbound sheets of books which might have offended Mussolini after the Fuehrer and the Duce had had a chat. It gained power with the slogan "*Weg mit Versailles*," execrated all things French, and voices its love of France on the Quai d'Orsay, while attempting to drive home the 'wedge' between France and England. It fulminated against the Polish Corridor, and holds out the hand of friendship to the Poles. It proclaimed the helplessness of Germany, and admits that it is armed to the teeth. Representing the labouring man, and incorporating the word *Arbeiter* in its title, it abolished labour unions. Preaching morality, it turned over the command of its *Sturm-Abteilung* to the notorious homo-sexual Roehm, and shot him to death at the time of the 'purge.' It was pro-Christian, forced the Protestant churches to elect a Nazi Reichsbishop, and celebrated Christmas with pagan rites. To the crucifix on various



public buildings it has added an inner circle upon which is chiselled, "*An Wotan gewidmet*"—"Dedicated to Wotan."

How is the German writer to live?

There is no obvious solution. As a class he is not adaptable. The visionary quality which makes creative writing possible frequently bars its possessor from less glamorous callings where it is the reverse of an asset. He might do tolerably as a reporter, literary hack, proof-reader, editor—yet for every such job, and they are fewer since 1933, there is a multiplicity of candidates, from whom a selection is made by strictly political methods.

If, however, the creative author—assuming that he is the descendant of four 'Aryan' grandparents—sticks to a profession which has become hazardous he faces conditions which are unparalleled. German newspapers, always the most important purchasers of fiction, have been so thoroughly censored that their circulations have disappeared and the principal publications are in the hands of receivers. The business of book publishing has been all but wiped out.<sup>1</sup> The impoverishment or exile of the Jews, formerly the largest *per capita* consumers of reading matter, has been costly to Christian authors and publishers. Play-producing has become a venture more perilous than ever. The few dramatists who enjoy the open favour of the Government make a bid for safety by avoiding the present scene: the rebuilt State Theatre, in Berlin, opened with *Thomas Paine*, a play by Hanns Johst, who deals with characters which have been dead a hundred years or more; in Dresden a new play by Eugen Linz deals with the murder of Thomas Becket;

<sup>1</sup> While the number of recent German publications in the fields of the novel and of biography is a fraction of what it used to be, it includes the following works of outstanding importance:

Thomas Mann: *Joseph und seine Brüder*. The first part of this trilogy, *Die Geschichten Jakobs*, appeared in 1933; the second part, *Der junge Joseph*, in 1934; the third part is still to appear.

Franz Werfel: *Die vierzig Tage des Musa Dagh* (1933).

Ernst Wiechert: *Die Majorin* (1934).

Ina Seidel: *Der Weg ohne Wahl* (1935).

Alfred Neumann: *Neuer Cäsar* (a biography of Louis Napoleon) (1934).

the performances at Carow's Lachbuehne, a vaudeville house, were interrupted so that a troupe of performing animals might be withdrawn when it was discovered that their trainer was a Hungarian Jew; and among the many plays submitted to the editor so that they might be considered for this volume was a dramatization of a tale by one of the most highly regarded German authors, which dealt (seriously, needless to say) with a young woman whose *fiancé* hesitated to marry her because a button was always missing from her blouse!

Under such conditions the creative writer may choose whether he is to work and starve, or whether he is to starve without working. The state of affairs may be made more vivid for the reader by the comment that of the thirty plays running in New York City at the moment that these lines are set on paper twenty-six would, for one reason or another, be closed by the German censor, and the four remaining would be allowed to continue only if changes were made in every cast.

Yet no student of the technique of dictatorship will deny the wisdom of preventing the public showing of plays which might interfere with the general *Gleichschaltung*.

The first play chosen for the present volume—because it was the most impressive and successful one-act play since *The Emperor Jones*—was Clifford Odets' *Till the Day I Die*. It struck the editor that it would be interesting to show both sides of the Nazi question: to print in the same volume with Odets' work a German play voicing the philosophy and the beliefs of the followers of Hitler. With that in mind the editor wrote directly to one of the best-informed members of the German Government, and received a most courteous reply:

You will kindly excuse this apparently tardy answer to your letter of July 15, 1935, which I received promptly. Heartily agreeing with every word you say in regard to the efficacy of one-act plays, I have made every possible effort to unearth at

least one or two one-act plays distinctly National-Socialist in philosophy. You will be as surprised as I was to learn that there has never been any concentrated effort in this direction.

I have made suggestions to various Party officials in charge of theatre and literature, advocating one-act plays, hoping that this suggestion will bear fruit for the benefit of the Party and of any number of authors anxious to dedicate their pens to the advancement of the National-Socialist idea.

In the meantime you might look over for yourself the following:

*Thomas Paine*, by Hanns Johst.  
*Familienväter*, by Dietrich Eckart.

A number of my friends have promised to look round for more. You may be certain that as soon as I get additional titles they will be forwarded to you.

Reference has already been made to Johst. Eckart has been dead for seven years. They are approved by the National Socialists, though they do not interpret them. But in the meantime Professor Winifred Smith, of Vassar College, had brought to the attention of the editor an extraordinary work by the poet Richard Euringer, entitled *Deutsche Passion: 1933*—"The German Passion Play: 1933."

Written in blazingly vivid verse, it tells in six brief scenes, following each other with intermissions of only a few seconds, of the redemption of Germany by an Unknown Warrior who, from the distant battlefield, and over the bridge of years between 1918 and 1933, hears the cry of his countrymen. Wearing a crown of barbed wire, he rises from the dead. He will become flesh to suffer his passion. He returns to earth to find Germany "a ruined field; a house for the mad." The German Army was never defeated; but while it was fighting simultaneously on four fronts it was stabbed in the back by "dreamers, writers, criminals, Democrats, Jews, pacifists, Marxists, and raspberry-Christians." Since then Germany has been the prey of traitors.

The Unknown Warrior call the folk to arms. There is no response: they have no weapons, and their counsellor is

## GERMANY

"a League of Nations built on monstrous lies." Germany needs a man—"one man," declares the Warrior, and asks that he be led into the heart of the morass.

There follows an amazing scene in which the Evil Spirit describes the corruption of Berlin, a modern Gomorrah, one of whose principal industries is (according to him) the export of the fair Germanic type of woman to Paris, Rio de Janeiro, Oslo, and Vienna. He is recognized for what he is, but he diverts the wrath of the mob to the Unknown Warrior:

There! That man with the crown of thorn!  
The wandering ghost! The Mother's Son!  
Is it not prohibited  
to leave one's place among the dead?

Tear open all his wounds!  
Hunt him down with hounds!  
Crucify him, and spit on him too!  
It is he who has done this thing to you!

The mob attacks the Warrior, but he is invulnerable, and in the fourth scene preaches a sermon. The people must sink class distinctions and go to work. There must be an end of greed and hatred. German youth must prepare to die for Germany; but

Faith, Hope, and Charity, these three  
enslave no nation: they make it free.

The Evil Spirit preaches hate; the Warrior preaches love; and the scene terminates with exhortations so inartistic that their authorship can be attributed only to a censor whose mind was on the approaching election: since the people are to choose between "God and the Devil" they are urged to go to their polling places and vote!

The fifth scene has been so mutilated that what remains is a farrago of nonsense. According to the pattern of the passion play, it should detail the death of the Warrior at the hands of the mob—but there is no hint of such an action. It may be surmised that those in power, wishing to live

while saving Germany, frowned on the suggestion that a saviour of his country might meet with mob violence.

In the final scene Germany has been reborn. Unemployment is at an end, the noise of industry is in the air, and the starving children who have been conspicuous in the preceding action have become healthy, well-fed little rascals. The poet asks:

Who, from the chaos of nothing and night,  
brought the miracle into the light?  
Who persevered, through dark and dread,  
fought through the storm, with stalwart tread?

The unspoken answer is "Hitler."

The Evil Spirit reappears. The Unknown Warrior must return to the dead:

Now split in two  
and down to hell with the half of you!

Instead, the Warrior ascends into heaven—where, as the Good Spirit, he will preside over the souls of the blessed warriors who died in the War. "An earthly marching-song begins to make itself heard." It is the *Horst Wessel Lied*, the song of the Nazis. The Evil Spirit recognizes it, cries out in dismay, "A third Reich? Then I might as well give up!" and plunges noisily back into the depths. "Organs resound from heaven. The earthly marching-song blends with them rhythmically and harmoniously."

Here, clearly, is a worth-while play. While it is neither the first nor the second in which the figure of the German Unknown Warrior has been substituted for that of Jesus, it is the only known expression of Nazi thought in dramatic form, and its verse is noble. A Chorus of the Dead, which translates almost word for word into English, is typical of its many exalted moments:

In the midst of death we are the living!  
Who threatened and threaten, unforgiving!  
We, who were slain, continue the fight;  
raging again in the dark of night.

## GERMANY

We, the burnt offering, do not burn dim;  
we, the suffering, torn limb from limb.  
Defiant our fall, proudly stand we,  
scornful of all! And ye?

The yardstick of truth is not the standard by which the play should be measured. Whether true or not, the poet's premises are among the fundamental articles of the Nazi creed, and as such determine the policies and the actions of the men in power to-day. A play which expresses those beliefs is important; and a play which expresses them in verse of which much is comparable with the best in German poetry is memorable.

A world interested in the rulers of Germany would like to read a play which explains that Hitler has come to heal the wounds of the past with his abundant love. The world has seen that love at work for three full years, and it is all ears for the poet who would speak for it. But the right to publish a complete English version is not to be procured without the personal approval of the Minister of Propaganda, Dr Goebbels, and that approval is unobtainable. While the play, after having been censored, was so completely in accord with the canons of 1933 that it was broadcast by all German stations on "The Day of the Nation," Thursday in Holy Week, Nazi philosophy has advanced since. Without discussing the minor points which might smack of heterodoxy to-day, it is possible that the poet erred in substituting a dead man for the Saviour, when his choice might more tactfully have been one who is still among the living.<sup>1</sup>

THE play which the editor has chosen to represent the one-act in present-day Germany is that which impressed him as by far the best and most original of those now available.

<sup>1</sup> As is done, for instance, in Virgilio Fiorentino's *Le 27 Cantate della Rivoluzione*. While the cast of characters in this poem of 22,000 verses includes God, the Virgin Mary, the Archangel Michael, innumerable lesser angels, the Pope, the King, the Unknown Warrior, and Dante, it is Benito Mussolini who ascends to heaven. The 'evil spirits' of this astonishing work speak through the mouths of ex-Premiers Nitti and Giolitti, Lenin, and Woodrow Wilson.

It is the work of a young writer who is apparently in a class by himself.

Hans Gross was born in Berlin in 1905. At nineteen he interrupted his studies—presumably it was necessary—to spend a year in the Siemens and Halske engineering works. He returned again to study, wrote a play entitled *Der Gral*, and carried off a prize with it in 1926. His play *Utopische Gesellschaft* was produced in Berlin in 1928. The Aktuelle Buehne, in the same city, produced his comedy, *So oder So*, the next year. *Ad Absurdum* is a series of four one-act plays, each of which is based on a paradox, and which includes *Krieg von Morgen* (1932), from which *The Next War*, the present text, is freely adapted.

In the meantime Gross had completed his studies as an engineer, and, having to choose between literature and engineering, chose engineering.





*Germany*

THE NEXT WAR

• A PLAY

By HANS GROSS

*Adapted by* PERCIVAL WILDE

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## CHARACTERS

A MAN

PETER

ANNA

MARIA

EVIE

SENTA

A FRENCHWOMAN

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## THE NEXT WAR

*The scene shows the interior of an extraordinarily well-fortified dugout in a trench. The walls are of concrete. At the right and the left are armoured doors. At the rear a square, door-like opening, giving the same impression of extreme solidity, permits a partial view of the trench. The furnishings, however, are those to be expected in any bourgeois living-room. To the left is a table, over which is a hanging lamp, and a sofa. A kitchenette, separated from the rest of the room by a curtain, is in the right upper corner. Its equipment includes a kitchen cabinet.*

*Chairs are scattered about the room. Everything contributes to an impression of cleanliness and tidiness.*

*At the table, under the lighted lamp, a young girl of perhaps thirteen is writing in a school notebook; a school geography is open at her side.*

*A simply dressed woman, carrying a pail, enters through the opening at the back.*

THE GIRL [*without looking up*]. Mamma, is that you? I want you to help me, Mamma. [*The woman goes to the kitchenette, pulls the curtain aside, and places the pail near the stove. The girl turns.*] Oh, it's you, Senta? [*She sighs.*] Oh, what a mess this is!

SENTA. What's a mess, Evie?

EVIE. I've got to write a composition about the beginning of the war. The teacher told us all about it, but it was so mixed up that I forgot everything she said. Why are we having a war?

SENTA. How should I know?

EVIE. Senta, it's just terrible!

SENTA. The war?

EVIE. No; the composition. I wish some time they'd have a war so stupid that nobody would ever have to write compositions about it.

SENTA. Child, all wars are stupid.

EVIE. But we're very comfortable here in the trenches, aren't we?

SENTA. It's probably worse somewhere else.

EVIE. Yes. Daddy hasn't written for such a long time. *[She goes back to her work. Senta, having emptied the pail into a cauldron, goes off at the left with the pail. Evie chews at her penholder. There is the sound of a heavy tread outside, and a fantastically dressed man appears at the entrance. He wears a dirty, dented tropical helmet, and shoulders a heavy rifle. He enters, panting audibly, and sits heavily upon a settee near the door. Evie turns, astonished.]* Where do you come from? What do you want here?

THE MAN. The devil take me if it isn't enough to drive a man crazy!

EVIE. Have you a furlough!

THE MAN. A furlough?

EVIE. A leave of absence—since you're here in the trenches? Are you looking for your wife?

THE MAN. I think I'm going mad!

EVIE. Oh! See what you've got there!

THE MAN *[astonished at the exclamation]*. What? Where?

EVIE. There! *[She indicates the rifle.]*

THE MAN. The gun?

EVIE *[astonished]*. Is *that* a gun? Oh, isn't it funny!

THE MAN. Funny, is it? What's funny about a gun?

EVIE *[controlling herself]*. What do you expect to do *here* with a gun?

THE MAN. What the devil, I've come here to help my native country! I want to fight the enemies of my Fatherland!

EVIE. The French?

THE NEXT WAR

THE MAN. Yes; and I hope you won't find anything funny about that!

EVIE [*stifling her laughter*]. But a gun! . . . And you've brought it to the trenches!

THE MAN. Even the children seem to have gone slightly insane.

EVIE [*again serious, and with a certain authority, as representing an absent lady of the house*]. I'm sure it's very nice of you to have come, and to have brought your gun with you. We have an awful lot of rats here. That's the only thing we don't like—the rats. But you'll shoot them all for us, won't you? Mother always says poison won't help any more: we need somebody with a gun, who'll wait, and who'll shoot the moment one of them shows a head. [*The man stares at her grimly. She chatters on.*] Is your gun loaded? Would you mind watching? Look: one of their holes is right under the kitchen cabinet!

THE MAN [*grimly*]. I didn't come here to shoot rats. I didn't set out on my long journey with such ambitions. I could have done that at home if I had wanted to.

EVIE. Well, then, why did you come here? Did you want to visit your wife?

THE MAN. Heavens and earth, I've got enough wives at home!

EVIE. *Wives*—to whom you're married?

THE MAN [*shortly*]. Yes.

EVIE. How many?

THE MAN. Five, by the devil's grandmother!

EVIE. Goodness gracious, you're married to five women! Did you run away from them?

THE MAN [*suppressing a mighty oath*]. I came here to fight against the enemies of my Fatherland. I am a German. I came from an island in the South Seas, where I abandoned everything I possess because I felt it was my duty to place myself at the disposal of my own country. I sailed across the ocean in a smack. I landed on the North Sea coast. I looked neither to the right nor to the left. I asked only one

question of the people I met "Where's the front?" I marched day and night. Now I'm at the front—and now I've got to ask myself if I've gone crazy.

*[A nice-looking, elderly woman, in a well-cut grey dress, enters at the back. She looks at both of the others.]*

THE WOMAN (ANNA). What's the matter here?

EVIE. Oh, Mamma, this man has come here from the South Seas, and he's got five wives, and he's married to all of them, and he brought his gun along, and he wants to shoot Frenchmen, but he won't shoot any rats!

THE MAN. Women! Nothing but women here! Girls! Children! Even grey-haired grandmothers! Has it come to the point that even women must fight?

ANNA. If I understood correctly you are a German who has been living in a foreign country, and you want to enlist in the service of your own. If you were told to come here you were misdirected. I simply can't understand——

EVIE. Mamma, he didn't talk to anybody. He came without looking right or left. *[To the man, precociously]* It would have been better if you had explained just what you wanted. That would have been the thing to do.

ANNA. Be quiet, Evie. *[To the man]* Will you sit down? You must be tired. Wouldn't you like a cup of coffee?

THE MAN *[shaking his head vigorously]*. Not now, thank you. And now, would you mind explaining to me what's going on here? So far as I can see the whole world is standing on its head.

ANNA. It was most heroic of you to have come to help the Fatherland.

THE MAN. I'm an old hand at hunting, you see, and I know how to handle a rifle. But, in the name of the devil, will you tell me where they need my strength, my weapon, my knowledge of tracking, and my courage? There are only women here. Where are my comrades, the men?

ANNA. At home—in the cities—the villages—offices—factories. That is their place. Do you know chemical analysis?

## THE NEXT WAR

THE MAN. Chemical analysis? I never heard of it in my life. What is it?

ANNA. Your gun won't help you much, my good man. We're engaged in a war with unlimited gas warfare. You must go to the nearest interior city and take a course in chemistry. Nearly every day somebody discovers a new war material. The men who protect our country must be very much on guard. For example, every one of them carries litmus paper in his pocket, so that he can test the wind for acidity. And that's only the beginning!

THE MAN. What has chemical nonsense to do with me? I want to fight! I want to have decent weapons put into my hands, so that I may use them against the enemy!

ANNA. You come too late. If you had been here a year ago they might have used you in the home guard, or they might have trained you to be an aviator, to stop enemy 'planes from dropping bombs. But now all the bombs are propelled by rockets. They set off a rocket in Paris, for instance, and it explodes over Berlin, covering it with a gas cloud which nobody can detect. . . . Did you hear that? That was one of them! You can hear them quite plainly. They fly so high that they're invisible, but you can hear them whistle as they go. Of course, *we* don't know which way they're going: whether they're headed towards our country or towards the enemy's. . . . Do you know mathematics? Do you know how to calculate a trajectory? Can you express the equation of a parabola? Do you understand ballistics? Given the elevation and the initial velocity, could you plot the curve of a projectile?

THE MAN. Plot? Calculate? I know my multiplication tables: they've been enough for me so far. . . . But parabolas? Tra—trajistics? To shoot into the sky, when there isn't an enemy in sight? To the devil with it!

ANNA [*simply*]. It would have been wiser had you stayed home.

THE MAN. This is my home.

ANNA. You should have remained with your wives.

THE MAN. With my wives?

EVIE. Mamma, he has five!

ANNA. Please be quiet, Evie. What will your wives be doing, now that they are alone in your house?

THE MAN. They'll fight; but they do that even when I'm there. But, please, tell me, what are *you* doing here? Why should women and children be *here*—in the front-line trenches, facing the enemy?

ANNA. We're here because it's the very safest place for us. These fortifications cannot be demolished by any shell. They can be sealed hermetically, and no gas can get in. They were built at the beginning of the war—during the first phase of trench warfare.

EVIE. Mamma, I've got to write a composition, *The Beginning of the War*. Fraulein Schröder told us we should describe the heroic combats of our fathers, but not to forget to say something about the first great gas battle. What was that like?

ANNA [*with a meaning gesture to the man, taking up her knitting and sitting at the table next her daughter*]. The laws of nations, forbidding the use of gas, were still in effect when the war started. Fronts were formed. The enemies built trenches facing each other. But when neither side was able to advance a hand's breadth, and when nobody retreated, all the offensives failed, and the troops had time to fortify their trenches so prodigiously that they became impregnable. By and by they found things becoming tedious, so they started the gas war.

EVIE [*writing*]. "They found things becoming tedious—"

ANNA. Child, you can't write that!

EVIE. Why can't I write it?

ANNA. Fraulein Schröder will give you a bad mark if you do.

EVIE. Why should she give me a bad mark? It's the truth! Here in the trenches everything *is* terribly tedious, and there's so much going on at home. Gerda's father wrote her that one evening at home he was going to drink a glass



of red wine, and all of a sudden the red wine turned blue. So Gerda's father snatched his gas-mask quickly and put it on, and it was lucky he had seen the wine turn blue, because he hadn't noticed anything at all, and he would have been suffocated. That's exciting, isn't it?

ANNA. Write, "As more and more countries took up arms against the Fatherland the League of Nations collapsed."

EVIE [*writing*]. "The League of Nations collapsed."

ANNA. No; write, "The League of Nations dissolved"—or "became meaningless." That's better.

EVIE. "... became meaningless."

ANNA. "Germany was surrounded. A blockade was begun to starve us out. We had no recourse other than to declare unlimited gas warfare. We had the best chemical plants in the world. Gas became our best weapon. It was a matter of life or death to us."

EVIE. And things got more interesting.

ANNA. No, child! Not at all! You don't look at things as seriously as you should! Isn't it bad that your father, back home, is threatened by insidious gases which he can't see, or smell, or feel, so that he'll drop dead if he doesn't look out, or if somebody else doesn't look out for him? [*Very seriously*] Our men are like rats in a trap: they don't know whether they're going to be drowned or poisoned.

EVIE [*writes*]. "... like rats in a trap ..."

ANNA. Don't write that, child! What would Fraulein Schröder say to it?

EVIE. But what should I write?

ANNA. Write that they are heroes, great mathematicians and chemists, that each of them discovers new gases as well as methods of making the enemy gases harmless. But some day—— [*She is silent, overcome by her emotions.*]

EVIE. Some day?

ANNA. The future will tell. It has no place in your composition. It is difficult, even for us grown-up people, to realize the truth. But describe the transformation of trench

warfare into a gas war, tell how the first bombs rained into the cities, killing the women and children, while the men were safe at the front, so that orders were soon given for the women to go to the trenches, while the men returned home. It became a tacit understanding between the enemies to do no harm to the front. Rockets flew over it, but went farther. Describe how it was when we came here, and made ourselves at home here, while the men . . . Well, you've lived through all of it. Go into the next room and write there, Evie.

EVIE [*taking up her writing materials, and going towards the left; passing the man*]. Please call me if you shoot any rats. I'd love to see you shoot them! Does your gun make a lot of noise when it goes off?

ANNA. Evie, please go.

EVIE. Yes, Mamma; but see that he calls me. [*She goes.*]

ANNA. It's a miracle that you got here safely. You had no gas-mask, nothing—

THE MAN [*without expression*]. No.

ANNA. What do you expect to do now? You are completely unprepared. You have had no experience. You might be killed on your way into the interior without even having known that you were in danger.

THE MAN. I shall press forward into the enemy's country! I'll slip across!

ANNA. You'll meet the enemy's women.

THE MAN. Women? Women? Nothing but women on the battlefield? I might as well have stayed home. . . .

ANNA. Yes; you should have.

THE MAN [*tearing at his collar*]. I've got to get out into the air! I'm stifling here! I feel as if I'd been caught in a trap!

[*He starts for the door.*]

ANNA [*calling after him*]. Come back a little later, and have a cup of coffee!

THE MAN. If I come back.

[*He goes. There is a pause, during which we hear the whistle of rockets. Senta re-enters.*]

THE NEXT WAR

ANNA [*turning from the door to her*]. So you're here? Put the coffee-pot on, Senta.

SENTA. It won't take long: we've got boiling water. Should I cut some cake?

ANNA. Have we any more homemade?

SENTA. Oh, yes! A whole piece.

ANNA. Where is Peter?

SENTA. He must be playing with the other boys in the trench.

ANNA. I hope they won't be too rough with him.

SENTA. I saw him just a little while ago near the guns.

ANNA [*frightened*]. Near the guns?

SENTA. He was sitting astride a cannon.

ANNA. But the boys *shouldn't* play there! If something went wrong——

SENTA. What should go wrong, ma'am? The guns have been there for a year—without ammunition. God knows when they were fired last.

ANNA. They worry me, nevertheless.

[*A young, very pretty woman comes in from the trench. Despite the simple dress she is wearing she conveys an impression of elegance and charm.*]

MARIA. Oh, Anna, he's coming! He's really going to have coffee with us! He was here before—he said so. What did he talk to you about? Why didn't you call me?

ANNA. What do you mean, Maria?

MARIA. The man from the South Seas, of course! I think he's fascinating!

ANNA [*dryly*]. Oh! So you've had a chat with him already?

MARIA [*nodding*]. His name is Robert, he says, but I'm already calling him Bobby. Oh, I've got to change my dress! [*She rushes off at the left.*]

ANNA [*shaking her head*]. Senta, bring three cups.

SENTA [*with vivid interest*]. Are callers coming?

ANNA [*smiling*]. You heard what my sister said.

SENTA. Is he—young?

ANNA. No—somewhat elderly. But he's very spry.

SENTA. Oh! Shall I put on a clean apron?

ANNA. Wear what you've got on, Senta. It won't make you so conspicuous. He's got five wives in his own home.

SENTA. My God, five wives! . . . Where is his home?

ANNA. In the South Sea Islands.

SENTA. Where the cannibals live?—Oh, well, he's got to have an extra wife or two in case one of them gets eaten up. [*Shaking her head, she returns to the stove.*] Five wives! What a life they must lead him!

[*The man enters, growls an unintelligible phrase, and throws his topee on a book.*]

ANNA. It is very nice of you to come here, Herr—Herr— [*The man growls.*] I didn't catch the name.

THE MAN [*grimly*]. I thought I'd meet some other man in the trenches.

ANNA. But you didn't, did you? Won't you sit down? Senta, the coffee.

SENTA. Can the gentleman stand it strong, or should I put in more hot water?

THE MAN [*a growl*]. What? [*Senta recoils.*]

ANNA. Senta, the burned corn we use instead of coffee is quite sure not to give the gentleman—hum!—a heart attack. [*Turning to the man*] We are glad to share what we have. These are war times, and—

THE MAN [*suddenly interested*]. Did you say you used burned corn? Show it to me. [*He takes the cup from Senta's hand, sips it, sniffs it, smacks his lips. Senta has offered him several of the kernels. He examines them closely.*] The first really worth-while thing I've learned since I left the South Seas!

ANNA [*smiling*]. A piece of cake?

MARIA [*entering at the left in an elegant dress, whose style is something to be determined by the future, but which is either outrageously long or outrageously short*]. Awfully nice of you to step in, Bobby! Do you mind if I sit on the sofa with you?

THE NEXT WAR

ANNA. A piece of cake?

SENTA. Milk?

MARIA. How do you like it here?

THE MAN [*with a glance at the women who surround him*]. I feel as if I were at home.

MARIA. Oh! How are your wives?

THE MAN. I hope they haven't taken advantage of my absence and eaten each other.

MARIA. Bobby, were you always sufficient for their needs?

THE MAN. What? What?

MARIA. The demands they made on you.

THE MAN. Hum! It would be more like it to ask if they were sufficient for the demands I made on them.

MARIA. Oh! . . . Do tell us something about them.

THE MAN. It's a closed chapter. Who knows if I'll ever see—  
[*He interrupts himself as Evie appears.*]

EVIE [*at the door*]. Mamma, do help me with my composition! Do you spell "rocket" with 'k' or 'ck'? Do come here!

ANNA [*with a wise smile*]. I'll come, Evie. Senta, see what Peter has done with himself. He should be home by now.

[*She goes off with Evie at the left. Senta, with a glance at the man and Maria, goes off at the back.*]

MARIA. Do you know, I think you're wonderful!

THE MAN. The cake isn't bad at all.

MARIA. Tell me about your trip. You must have had all kinds of adventures.

THE MAN. Well, so so.

MARIA. You must have been on your way a long time. Were you all alone in a boat on the ocean? Wasn't it lonely? It must have taken weeks.

THE MAN [*munching*]. Is there any more cake?

MARIA. Here. . . . You were all alone! Didn't you miss—I mean, you were used to such a large household. That is to say, the tropical climate of the South Seas . . .

With five wives, you must have looked to them for so much. . . .

THE MAN. Well, so so.

MARIA. During the long, long weeks didn't you miss them? [*The man makes no reply. She leans her head on his shoulder.*] When you landed you went on your way! You looked at nobody, no man, no woman——

THE MAN. Yes, that's true. I didn't see any women in the streets. That should have seemed remarkable to me.

MARIA. It should have. . . . But when you arrived here you discovered what you had missed on your long trip. [*Pause.*] Didn't you? [*Pause.*] Don't be shy about it, Bobby: speak up.

THE MAN. Yes?

MARIA [*putting her arms round his neck*]. Tell me what you missed! . . . It might be possible to—to help you. . . . Perhaps you will be doing somebody else a favour. . . . You see, we women in the trenches . . .

THE MAN [*emphatically*]. No! It's out of the question for you! It's nothing for women!

MARIA [*greatly astonished*]. Nothing for women? Why not?

THE MAN [*looking about*]. Slip it to me quietly.

MARIA. What do you mean?

THE MAN. The bottle of brandy, of course—or whatever else you've got in the cupboard.

MARIA [*feebly; relaxing her clasp*]. Brandy! . . . No, we haven't got any of that. . . . There's nothing else you want just now, Robert? [*She rises.*] I was greatly mistaken about you.

[*The sound of shooting is suddenly heard. They start.*]

THE MAN [*jumping up and seizing his gun*]. So there is something to shoot at! Something for me at last!

[*He goes out quickly.*]

ANNA [*entering, frightened, from the left*]. Maria, what was that?

MARIA. I think there were shots. It sounded like it.

THE NEXT WAR

ANNA. But there's been no shooting here for a year!

SENTA [*leading in Peter, a boy of twelve, by the hand*]. Here's the criminal! The whole trench is upset. He played with a machine-gun. It went off. There must have been cartridges in it.

ANNA. Peter! To play with a machine-gun! . . . Good heavens!

PETER. Mamma, Conrad turned the crank first, and nothing happened. Then I did it—and it went off all of a sudden. Please don't spank me, Mamma!

ANNA. But you deserve a spanking! You might have shot somebody! [*To Senta*] Did anybody get hurt?

SENTA. I don't know.

PETER. It fired into the air—over there. [*He points.*]

ANNA. Towards the French trenches? Good heavens! [*To Senta*] Go out, inquire, see if anything has happened!

[*Senta goes. In the doorway she passes the man, who re-enters silently, shrugging his shoulders, and seats himself in the background. Anna walks up and down anxiously.*]

PETER [*crying*]. Mamma, don't spank me! I promise never to do it again!

ANNA. If you shot somebody—over there! What on earth will they think of us? God will punish you, Peter!

PETER. Mamma, I'm so sorry! . . . Perhaps I've killed Maurice—or Jean. I thought of it right away—but I couldn't know the thing was loaded, after Conrad—

ANNA [*interrupting*]. Who is Maurice? Who is Jean?

PETER. They're boys over there. We— [*He sobs.*]

ANNA. Well?

PETER. We sneak over, and we play with them.

[*Anna lets fall the switch she has taken up.*]

SENTA [*rushing in*]. Somebody's coming from the other trenches! It's a woman with a white flag! Good heavens, what shall we do? One of *them*.

THE MAN [*cheerfully*]. A flag of truce. They want to surrender because they're afraid of being shot.

EVIE [*who entered at the left some time ago*]. Mamma, is the war over?

THE MAN [*feeling himself master of the situation*]. I will discuss terms with her. [*He goes out.*]

ANNA. What's going to happen now, Peter, if you really hit somebody!

PETER [*weeping*]. I'll never, never do it again!

THE MAN [*outside*]. Come in here.

[*He allows a Frenchwoman, a young, extremely well-dressed woman, carrying a white silk shawl in her hand, to precede him.*]

THE FRENCHWOMAN [*with a little accent*]. Ladies, zey 'ave tol' me zat ze bad little boy w'at 'as give us such a fright finds 'imself 'ere. Is zat 'im? [*She approaches Peter.*]

ANNA. Peter, bow to the lady, and apologize to her.

PETER. Oh, I know you! You're Maurice's mamma! Maurice showed you to me the last time we played over there!

THE FRENCHWOMAN. So you know me, zen? You were over zere? Wit' us? W'y did not Maurice introduce you to me?

PETER. We thought it wouldn't be allowed. . . .

THE MAN [*clearing his throat*]. Was your—your friend—also over here—in *our* trenches?

PETER. Yes; we played together here, too.

THE MAN. I'll be damned if that doesn't look like espionage to me!

MARIA. Ridiculous, Bobby! There's nothing to be spied on here, and there isn't anything on the other side either! Isn't that true, madame?

THE FRENCHWOMAN. *Absolument*. [*Turning to Peter*] So—if you are a frien' of my son zen you would not like to do 'im a—w'at is ze word——?

MARIA. A bad turn.

THE FRENCHWOMAN. Yes; a bad turn. Is not zat so?

PETER. It went off all by itself. We were awfully scared.

ANNA. Nobody was hit on your side?



THE NEXT WAR

THE FRENCHWOMAN. *Oh, non!* We 'ad our wash 'ung out on ze line. Zere is a 'ole in a union suit—a little 'ole—zat is all.

ANNA. We will send you another suit.

THE FRENCHWOMAN. It is not wort' talkin' about. . . . We knew right away zat it was a accident. But zey send me 'ere to make sure. •

ANNA. We're very glad, madame. Won't you sit down? Perhaps you'll have a cup of coffee with us?

THE FRENCHWOMAN. Oh, zat is so good of you!

ANNA [*to Senta*]. Pour a cup for the lady, and then go to the post-office. Perhaps there's something for me.

[*Senta pours, and leaves.*]

THE FRENCHWOMAN. 'Ere you are very *comfortable*, is it not? Truly, you have arrange' everysing in such good tast! Oh, spice' cakes! It is so long since I 'ave eaten Cherman spice' cakes!

ANNA. Help yourself, please.

THE FRENCHWOMAN [*sitting at the table*]. Oh, sank you.

MARIA. You speak excellent German, madame.

THE FRENCHWOMAN. Before ze war I studied at 'Eidelberg. [*Enthusiastically*] *Oh, mon Dieu!* W'at a sharming dress!

MARIA. I cut it out myself.

THE FRENCHWOMAN. Oh, 'ave you got ze pattern? Would you be so kin' to lend him to me? Oh, sank you! . . . [*She notices the work with which Anna has been busy.*] W'at beautiful sewing! Your own work?

ANNA. I'm working on it—for my husband. It is a gas-mask.

THE FRENCHWOMAN. I am crazy about fancy work! You 'usban' will be 'appy, madame! Sharming!

THE MAN [*clearing his throat*]. Cuckoo!

THE FRENCHWOMAN [*turning to him, laughing*]. Did you say somesing?

THE MAN. I think we're about to come to terms.

THE FRENCHWOMAN. Terms? W'at you mean? 'E

has promise' never to do it again. Isn' zat true, *mon petit*?  
W'at is your name?

PETER. Peter.

THE FRENCHWOMAN. Peter: *Pierre*. It is a sweet name!  
W'at is your name, monsieur? [*The man growls something.*]

MARIA. We call him Bobby. His real name is Robert.

THE FRENCHWOMAN [*pronouncing his name in the French fashion*]. Robert—sharming! Would you like to visit us, Robert? We 'ave a little of ze cognac *veritable*.

THE MAN [*much interested*]. Cognac! Cognac!

MARIA [*pushing him back as he attempts to rise*]. No, Bobby won't visit you! He's going back into his own country, to join the fighters. He has travelled an unusually long distance——

THE FRENCHWOMAN. To fight for ze Fazerland! You are a hero, Robert! [*She turns to the ladies.*] But you mus' visit me. I shall be so glad. Per'aps we might start a—w'at you say?—a sewing circle. It is so tedious in ze trenches—an' we worry so much about our men at 'ome——

[*Senta enters, visibly upset.*]

ANNA. What is it, Senta?

SENTA. A telegram. Oh, my God!

ANNA. The telegram is for me?

SENTA. At home [*she sobs*]—a new gas. Many dead. It goes through anything and eats the skin, and there isn't any gas-mask that will stop it!

ANNA. Is the telegram for me? [*Senta gives it to her, sobbing. Anna opens it with trembling hands, reads it, drops her hands nervelessly, stares straight out. She speaks in a lifeless voice.*] My husband was one of them—one of the first to be killed by it. . . . It had to happen that way!

PETER. What is it, Mamma? [*She breaks out sobbing.*]

ANNA. Oh, Peter!

THE FRENCHWOMAN. Oh, my mos' sincere—w'at is ze word? W'at is ze word? Oh, *mon Dieu*!

[*The man gives himself a shake; takes his gun and helmet and goes towards the door. Evie enters.*]

THE NEXT WAR

MARIA. Bobby, where are you going?

THE MAN. Home—where I came from.

MARIA. But the gas!

THE MAN. I am accustomed to cannibals.

*[He tramps out. Anna, quite overcome, weeps on the Frenchwoman's shoulder.]*

EVIE *[tugging at her skirt]*. He's gone, Mamma! Mamma, he's gone! *[Then, in a tone of bleak tragedy]* Mamma, who's going to shoot the rats now?

THE CURTAIN FALLS



## *Austria*

### ALEXANDER LERNET-HOLENIA: "SAUL"

PERHAPS no capital in the world is more unfortunate than Vienna. Certainly no country suffered more at Versailles than did Austria. The Dual Monarchy ruled over heterogeneous peoples speaking many tongues, and aflame, at all times, with internal hatreds; but the composite nation functioned under Austrian direction as a successful economic unit. Versailles tore apart the members of that unit, and commanded head, trunk, and limbs to go their separate ways. The result has been a generation of unco-ordinated and wasted effort, and it is reflected in the literature of the period.

Present-day Vienna is in a position to supply the intellectual needs of a population many times larger than the seven million who inhabit the remains of Franz Josef's kingdom. In addition to the native writers, who have gravitated to the capital, the literary and artistic resources of the city have been enriched by distinguished refugees from Nazi Germany, whose choice of a second fatherland has naturally been the only other sizable country where their language is spoken. Novelists, poets, and dramatists of high rank are plentiful in Vienna; but only those whose writings command English and American audiences are prosperous. Actors whose names were once box-office attractions are abundant. It would be possible, at the moment, to open a dozen theatres simultaneously with an 'all-star' cast playing in each; but the decapitated head of the former nation has no audience to patronize its offerings, and is too poor itself to finance them.

The present is a time of artistic sterility. "We realize that conditions are temporary," a leading Austrian man of letters

wrote to the editor. "In fifty or a hundred years they will probably be normal again, but by then we shall all be dead."

It is for that reason that the play offered here as representative of the best in contemporary Austrian dramatic writing is singularly interesting. Its thought is ultra-modern. It takes no cognizance of the demands of the commercial theatre. It flouts the conventions as it pleases. Its language, in parts, is so blasphemous that even the Little Theatres which recognize the power and beauty of the work may modify it before venturing to produce it. Since, however, Alexander Lernet-Holenia is no tyro, his disregard of the canons cannot be laid at the door of inexperience. The explanation is simpler: at a time when writing had become unprofitable the author wrote solely to please himself. The idea was compelling. He set it on paper without making concessions. The reward of the work was the work itself. The result is a play so unusual that the editor knows of no other with which it may be compared.

Lernet-Holenia was born in 1897. His education was that customary for a young Austrian of good family. The War broke out when he was seventeen, and he saw active service as a lieutenant of dragoons in one of Archduke Albrecht's regiments. After the War he finished his education and began writing. He has published three volumes of poems, *Kanjonair*, *Das Geheimnis St Michaels*, and *Die goldene Horde*. His half-dozen novels include *Die Standarte* and *Die Auferstehung des Maltravers*. A volume of his short stories appeared under the title of *Die neue Atlantis*. His plays include the full-length work *Lauter Achter und Neuner*, and a number of one-acts, of which *Ollapodrida*, a strange comedy terminating in a suicide, has been much acted in Germany, where it carried off the coveted Kleist Prize.

*Saul* is a modernistic treatment of the witch of Endor episode (1 Samuel, xxviii).

Without exception, painters have represented the witch

as a withered hag. Lernet-Holenia is more logical. If all of the witches were put to death at Saul's behest, and none escaped, it follows that the one with whom we have to deal is "a young one that just grew up." She is seventeen and pretty; but, being a peasant, she would be the better for a bath. Her *modus operandi* is similar to that of a modern medium.

Jonathan is a completely convincing young man. He is incredulous at the sight of the young witch: "A witch should look like one, shouldn't she?" But he adjusts himself to the situation. "Let's get on with it," he urges impatiently. "Hocus pocus, hodge podge, abracadabra!" Even in extreme peril he is debonair: "Yes, it looks damnably as if we'll be biting the grass to-morrow," but, having to hold the witch while she is in a trance, he fondles and kisses her to his heart's content. It is possible to understand why David loved him.

Saul, surely one of the most sorely tried characters in the Bible, is represented as the highly intelligent man he must have been. According to his own standards, he has served God well: "I have built up His kingdom, I have borne it on my strong shoulders, I have fought more battles for Him than there are fingers on my hands." But, having been supernaturally chosen against his own wishes, having temporarily possessed the gift of prophecy, and having been troubled more than once by "an evil spirit from the Lord," he is in need of supernatural reassurance at all times. Once it came in the voice of God. When he ceased to hear it he peopled his world with dæmons. Now that they cannot aid him he turns to a witch—first questioning the farmer who shelters her to discover what feats she has accomplished in the past and exactly how she has accomplished them. Saul has been fooled by both God and the dæmons: he will not be fooled again.

He is old, and worn, and embittered; yet his reasoning is far above the thought processes of his marshals. He hears from Samuel that he and his sons have less than a day to

live, and that his army will meet defeat. He is momentarily overcome, as any commanding general would be—particularly if he has neither eaten nor slept—but he collects himself quickly. If he could he would ride and postpone the battle, so that his tired troops may rest. Since that is impossible he will die fighting at their head; and that decision is so obviously a matter of *noblesse oblige* that he does not even mention it. For the present he is neither a general nor a king: he is a man, and he is hungry. He eats—"so that I may remain alive—until to-morrow." A man in distress: but a man.

What is there to be said about the astonishing lines with which the play commences—the Lord's Prayer—recited a thousand years before Jesus first pronounced it; the Ave Maria—offered up while the air is filled with the clatter of the hoofs of horsemen whose bones will have been dust for fifty generations when Mary is born? Only this: that compared with the feat of a witch, who, speaking in the thickest of Viennese dialects, is able to raise the prophet Samuel from the dead, they are merely minor miracles. This, too: that the beginning, unparalleled in all dramatic literature, creates an atmosphere which makes an audience ready to accept the miracles which follow.

Since writing the above the editor is in receipt of a letter from Herr Lernet-Holenia:

I am glad that you are publishing *Saul* in your book. I consider it my most meritorious as well as my best-rounded play. It is a distinction for me that a work so brief aroused your interest.

You refer to the anachronisms. They, however, are drawn not out of our own day, but out of the Middle Ages. I reasoned thus:

While the theme, in any event, should be moved nearer the present, it did not seem appropriate to me to transplant the drama itself into modernity. The Middle Ages are the most recent epoch whose religious outlook approximates that of antiquity. The Middle Ages, so to speak, supply a basis upon



which antiquity and modernity may meet and find things in common—particularly when dealing with the religious theme of *Saul*.

In the light of this subtle psychological distinction Lernet-Holenia's use of the Lord's Prayer and the Ave Maria invites comparison with those great pictures of the Renaissance in which the characters of the Bible are attired in the costumes of mediæval Italy and Spain.

The editor's interpretation is therefore wrong; and it is good for editors to admit how frequently they are mistaken.



*Austria*

SAUL

A PLAY

By ALEXANDER LERNET-HOLENIA

*Adapted by* PERCIVAL WILDE

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## CHARACTERS

SAUL  
JONATHAN  
THE MARSHAL OF THE  
RIGHT WING  
THE MARSHAL OF THE  
LEFT WING  
THE WITCH  
A FARMER  
A FARM WIFE  
A FARM LAD  
A SERVANT  
PEASANTS  
SAMUEL

*The scene is Endor*

ADAPTOR'S NOTE. The costuming of the characters  
should be that of the sixteenth century.

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## SAUL

A SERVANT [*bowing over a table about which is seated the farmer's household, and praying before the evening meal*]. Our Father, which art in heaven——

THE OTHERS [*joining in*]. Hallowed by Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil——

[*A loud blare of trumpets, carried by the wind, which they dominate. The witch sighs, and twitches from side to side in fear.*]

THE FARMER. Hold her! She has cramps! She's going to be sick again! What's the matter? Is your trouble coming over you? Now?

THE WITCH. I hear trumpets, farmer! Don't you hear them yourself? The wind carries the sound here.

THE FARMER. What do you mean, trumpets? It's suppertime. Perhaps there are riders, riding God knows where.

THE FARM LAD. Yes, riders.

THE FARMER. They've been riding to and fro all day long.

THE WITCH. But not these, farmer, not these! You will see! They will ride here, neither to the right nor the left, they will ride here, straight here——

THE FARMER. If you're sick, woman, rest; but don't upset the rest of us. The riders will pass on. Everybody passes on.

THE WITCH. No, farmer! Not these! They are coming to us: I feel it. They won't harm any of the cattle in the

sheds; they won't injure anything that's yours; but they're coming on account of us!

THE FARMER. Don't get people to come here, you witch, or I'll kill you!

THE SERVANT. They won't dare come. [*To the witch*] They know you're possessed by a devil.

[*The trumpets are heard, nearer.*]

THE WITCH. There! There!

THE FARM LAD. Riders have been galloping through the valley all day! They set fire to buildings! They kill the cattle in their stalls, the ducks in the courtyard, the women in their beds! They carry off the boys with them, they make riders of them, men of iron, like themselves!

THE FARM WIFE. Great God, they aren't really coming here?

THE FARM LAD. Oh, yes, you'll see! Everything will go helter-skelter!

THE FARMER. Shut up, or I'll rip off your ears!

THE FARM LAD. It's war-time, farmer, it's——

THE FARMER [*striking him*]. War-time, eh? Well, here's war for you!

THE FARM WIFE [*siding with the farmer*]. He's a scoundrell! His talk is enough to make you sick!

THE WITCH. Farmer!

THE FARMER. What do you want?

THE WITCH. The riders are coming nearer, nearer! Do you hear, farmer? I feel it! They are blowing trumpets made of silver and lead! It's enough to make my hair stand on end! Cold shivers run up and down my back! They are blowing loudly, as if before some very great lord! They announce some one who is a powerful man! His power radiates to me! I sense it! And the trees bow because of it, as in a storm, which, when it comes, forces the standing corn to its knees——

THE FARMER. Stop it! Don't upset us at meal-time with your brain-shattering talk! Let us go on with our prayers! [*To the servant*] Pray!

SAUL

THE WITCH. My God, farmer, they are near—very near! I sense it, farmer! Let me go! Let me go!

THE FARMER [*screaming*]. Stop! You pray for us! [*The teeth of the witch chatter in an agony of fright.*] Hail, Mary, full of grace—

THE SERVANT. Hail, Mary, full of grace! The Lord is with Thee. Blessèd art Thou amongst women, and blessèd is the fruit of Thy womb, Jesus!

THE OTHERS [*joining in*]. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death!

[*The clatter of many hoofs outside; bugles blow the call to dismount.*]

THE WITCH [*greatly terrified*]. There, now! There, now!

[*There is the greatest commotion and upset. Saul, Jonathan, and the two Marshals enter.*]

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING [*commandingly*]. Attention!

[*Saul's face is ashen grey. He wears a brown dress. He is supported on either side by the Marshals. The Marshals and Jonathan are in war panoply, and wear long spurs. The Marshal of the Right Wing wears gold, embroidered with red lions; the Marshal of the Left Wing silver, with black eagles. Jonathan is unhelmeted, and clad in blue, decorated with gold dolphins.*]

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING [*to the farmer*]. What are your people screaming about? [*The farmer stares at him.*] Answer! What are they doing here, together?

THE FARMER. Eating. It is meal-time.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Why were they screaming?

THE FARMER. Screaming? About a wench.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Which one?

THE FARMER. That one. [*He indicates the witch.*]

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Why was she screaming? [*The farmer is silent.*] Answer!

THE FARMER. She was afraid, I guess.

ALEXANDER LERNET-HOLENIA

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING [*looking at her*].  
Who and what is she?

THE FARMER. One of my serving-women. [*A pause.*]

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Come here,  
you!

[*The witch is thrust forward. The Marshal of the  
Right Wing crosses to Saul and whispers with him.*]

THE MARSHAL OF THE LEFT WING. Kneel! All of  
you! Be respectful! These are lords! [*The entire household  
kneels.*] Prostrate yourselves before that lord!

[*He indicates Saul. They try to kiss the hem of his  
garment.*]

SAUL [*waving his hand*]. Away! [*They rise and fall back.*]

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING [*indicating the  
witch*]. She! She mustn't look at us! Look away! Isn't  
she the woman that has a spirit?

THE FARMER. A spirit? [*He becomes nervous.*]

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Yes. One of  
you here has a spirit. She is a prophetess: a witch.

THE FARMER. Here?

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Yes. She can  
see into the future. [*The farmer is silent.*] You admit it?

THE FARMER. No.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. What? No?  
Come here! You are talking to a lord! Speak!

THE FARMER. Master, there is no such person here.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. No? You,  
give me a truthful answer when I command you!

THE FARMER. No; certainly not, master; not in my  
house, master.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. But the people  
say yes. They say she is in your house. Where else should  
she be?

THE FARMER. Where, indeed, master, when there are  
no more witches?

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. What do you  
mean?



SAUL

THE FARMER. Witches, master, were killed as the king commanded. They were hanged and burned up and down the land. There is not one of them left alive.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Yes, there is! The one in your house! A young one: one that just grew up!

THE FARMER. No, master.

SAUL [*screaming, beside himself*]. Yes, you dog! You, you damned farmer, there's a witch here! That woman! That one! [*Staggering towards her*] Are you a witch, you? Yes? Say yes! Say you are, or I'll have you burned! Say yes! Can you see into the future? Can you prophesy? Once the world was full of creatures like you: there were so many of them that they trod on each other's feet! Do you mean to tell me that now, all of a sudden, there aren't any more? What? Have they all gone to the devil? Has everything that is hellish gone out of the world, all at once? It's insane, because everything is hellish, wherever I look! So you don't want to be a witch? No? Now that for once I need one? I'll have you tied hand and foot, you cow, and my troops will march on your body until your devil appears and prophesies! Your devil! God has abandoned me for years and years! God knows where He has gone! I see no signs of Him any more, no tokens. Surely the other one hasn't gone away also—that one! [*He points at a grotesque painting of a devil on the wall.*] One of them must still be here—what? Answer! You must answer! [*He shakes her.*] Will you prophesy? Are you a witch? Will you prophesy?

THE WITCH [*in despair*]. Yes, master, I . . . Yes, master.

SAUL. Good!

[*He falls backward, and the Marshals catch him.*]

JONATHAN [*to one of the Marshals*]. Look here, Marshall! D'you mean to say it's that girl there, that young woman, the pretty one? What luck we're here! D'you know, I wouldn't have believed it when we came in? I thought the

witch would be this one or that one [*he indicates various peasant women*], an ugly old hag, really looking like a witch! A witch should look like one, shouldn't she? D'you know, Marshal, all you have to do is look over any hundred people to pick out a witch you can swear to—and then it always turns out to be the most repulsive individual in the whole lot? That's the correct way, so far as I'm concerned: one with a big nose, as if a toad were sitting on her face; a wench, fat as a quail, old and scabby, never, by any chance, under sixty! This one here? If you could only pitch her into the nearest lake to get rid of her dirt and her peasant-like stink, why, she could look at a man without making him blind. [*To the witch*] Come here! Stop your howling! [*He raises her from her knees, and pulls her hands away from her face.*] Are you really a witch?

THE WITCH [*still racked with sobs*]. No, master; not a real one.

JONATHAN. No? Well, what are you, then?

THE WITCH. The people call me a witch because I have a spirit, young master. I fall asleep, and he speaks through me.

JONATHAN. A spirit? You're just imagining things! Or aren't you? D'you know, drunken people also talk in their sleep? Don't worry about it.

THE WITCH. What is going to happen now, young master?

JONATHAN. You'll have to make some hocus pocus, see spirits, or something. [*He chuckles.*] Don't be afraid.

THE WITCH. Who is the important-looking man in the brown cloak?

JONATHAN. He? Don't know. Not allowed to know. He's a great man. He's travelling incog.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING [*after speaking with Saul. To the farmer*]. You! Pay attention! What sort of things does she do? What kind of spirit has she got?

THE FARMER. Nobody can see him.

SAUL

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Indeed?

THE FARMER. It's an invisible spirit. You can't see him or feel him.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Then how do you know he's there?

THE FARMER. He upsets the whole house.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. How?

THE FARMER. There are knocks on the doors, steps in the courtyard, in the attic; and for a half-day, a whole day, nobody can sleep. We all pray.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. How do you know *she* has anything to do with it? It might be on account of somebody else.

THE FARMER [*shaking his head*]. When she goes away everything is quiet.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Is there any way of proving that a spirit has been here? Does he break anything?

THE FARMER [*nodding*]. We find great rocks in the barn; they fly there through the air; nobody throws them. Copper dishes are dented, and look as if two or three ruffians had stamped on them.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. What else? Prophecies? Does he speak through her?

THE FARMER. Yes.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. What?

THE FARMER. As if he were asleep.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. What, I asked you, does he prophesy?

THE FARMER. She senses what is going to happen, and tells us.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. How long has she been like that?

THE FARMER. Bewitched, master?

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Yes.

THE FARMER. Nearly two years. That often happens to virgins at the time of puberty.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. How old is she now?

THE FARMER. Seventeen.

[*The Marshal of the Right Wing leaves him, and whispers with Saul.*]

THE WITCH [*to Jonathan*]. Even before you arrived, young master, I sensed that a powerful man was coming here. I felt every step, as if his horse were trampling on my heart.

JONATHAN. Yes? Did you have a premonition? You look as if you could have premonitions.

THE WITCH. Are you a great lord attached to the Court, young master?

JONATHAN. Well, something like that. It looks that way, doesn't it?

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING [*to the farmer*]. You! What is it like when she prophesies? Does she need help?

THE FARMER. What?

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Does she need anything—fire, or dried herbs, or something like that?

THE FARMER. No, it happens of its own accord.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Whenever she pleases? Can she see into the future whenever she wants to, or does she have to wait?

THE FARMER. Wait? I don't know.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Ask her—no! Be quiet. [*To the witch*] You, come here!

THE WITCH. Yes, master.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. I told you to look away while I'm talking to you!

JONATHAN. Don't be ridiculous, Marshal. She has no evil eye.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. How do you know that? [*To the witch*] You are to prophesy right away—for the lord there, that lord. [*He indicates Saul.*] Right away. Do you understand?

SAUL

THE WITCH [*frightened*]. Yes, master.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. But you are to do more than that: you are to bring up a spirit.

THE WITCH. Bring him up?

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Yes.

THE WITCH. What kind of spirit, master?

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Don't ask. You know who is wanted: what spirit it will be. They say you can do that: bring up a spirit.

THE WITCH. Yes. Those who speak through me are dead: my spirit too. I cannot speak without his help.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Nor are you to do so. The spirit is to speak with my lord, visibly, face to face: the spirit he wants you to bring up, the spirit of a man he knew when he was alive. Do you understand? Can you do it?

THE WITCH. Yes, master, I think so.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Really? Think it over, you; don't answer me so glibly. I said that a dead man is to be brought up. That isn't the same thing as fetching a cabbage out of the cellar.

THE WITCH. I am often surrounded by dead men.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Can you bring them up to order?

THE WITCH. I have never brought up anybody except for myself.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Then you will do it now for another person.

THE WITCH. I don't know, master, if he'll come. I'll go to sleep. Perhaps he'll come; perhaps he won't.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING [*who has crossed to Saul in obedience to a gesture, and has returned*]. Visible! He is to be visible!

THE WITCH. Yes.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. The farmer says that nobody ever sees your spirits.

THE WITCH. Because nobody has ever dared look at

them. I see all of them. If you really want to see them you'll see them. But it's much harder for me to make them visible. Somebody must hold me while I'm doing it. Sometimes I'm covered with blood when I wake: I fling myself around so much while I'm unconscious. [*The Marshal of the Right Wing speaks with Saul in an undertone.*] Master.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. What is it?

THE WITCH. I beg you, master, on my bended knees I beg you, don't tell anybody about this, because the king will have me burned, like the others before me, if I prophesy, even under compulsion.

SAUL [*waves his hand*]. Granted. [*There is a pause.*]

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. You understand?

THE WITCH. No.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. You will not be punished.

THE WITCH. By whom?

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. By this lord, who is also my lord, a very great one.

THE WITCH. I see that for myself, but why is he wearing such strange clothes?

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Be quiet. . . . Can you do it now?

THE WITCH. Yes, master.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Everybody else out! Quick! Keep away from the door! Far away! Out with you!

[*The peasants, after kneeling, crowd out. There is a pause.*]

JONATHAN. Well, let's get on with it! Hocus pocus, hodge podge, abracadabra! Nothing's going to happen. My father's a bit weak in the head.

THE WITCH. Will you hold me, young master?

JONATHAN. Hold you?

THE WITCH. So that I don't fall while I'm asleep.

SAUL

JONATHAN. Yes, indeed! I'll hold you! I'll hold you just as long as you wish.

THE MARSHAL OF THE LEFT WING [*going to the witch*]. My master says begin. He wants to see the dead man.

THE WITCH. Yes, sir. Let him tell me who it is.

THE MARSHAL OF THE LEFT WING. One of his friends—of long ago.

THE WITCH. Your master must tell me his name, so that I can find him, and he must think of him while I'm asleep, and talk about him too. Then he'll appear. Your master is to talk with you, but he must think about the spirit he wants to rise.

THE MARSHAL OF THE LEFT WING [*to Saul*]. She wants the name, gracious lord.

SAUL. What name?

THE MARSHAL OF THE LEFT WING. His name.

SAUL. No. Not the name. She must not know who I am!

THE WITCH. How shall I bring him up, then, master?

SAUL. Not the name! What next?

THE WITCH. I can't do it without the name, master.  
I—

SAUL [*breaking out*]. Damnation! You shall do it, I say! Up with him! I want to see him, do you understand? Either you'll do it or I'll hang you on the nearest tree with my own hands, you damnable creature!

THE WITCH. But I can't, master, I can't—

JONATHAN. Father, you're really unreasonable. How can she do it if she doesn't know the man's name? What's the harm in telling her? It won't give her the least clue to who *you* are.

SAUL. Because—

[*He breaks off.*]

THE MARSHAL OF THE LEFT WING. It would be wisest to do what we should have done at the outset: drop the matter, and ride on, gracious—

SAUL [*roaring at him*]. Be quiet! [*He turns to Jonathan.*] Tell her.

JONATHAN. Yes?

SAUL. Go ahead.

JONATHAN [*to the witch*]. Pay attention, now! It's an old man: in the eighties. His name is Samuel. Do you understand?

THE WITCH. Yes. . . . Samuel?

SAUL. Do you know who he was?

THE WITCH. No. There are many men of that name.

SAUL. Good. . . . Now, will you be able to find him?

THE WITCH. Yes. I think so.

[*A pause.*]

SAUL. Well, then, start!

THE WITCH. Yes, master. Think about him, and talk with your two noblemen. [*To Jonathan*] Are you coming here now, young master? Hold me. [*She leads him to the table.*] I'll sit here. Hold my hands. Hold them tightly. Sit next to me, young master. I shall be asleep soon. Hold me tight, very tight!

JONATHAN. Yes—but why?

THE WITCH. When I'm asleep I have strength, great strength, as if I were a man.

JONATHAN. I'll hold you for all that.

THE WITCH. Don't let go of me, sir! If you do that I'll wake with a shock.

JONATHAN. It's all right. You can trust me.

THE WITCH. You won't let go, even when the dead man appears?

JONATHAN. No. Why should I? But he won't appear.

THE WITCH. He will. . . . Now tell your master to talk.

[*She leans back.*]

JONATHAN. Talk with the others, Father.

SAUL [*to the Marshals*]. I am tired. Talk to me.

JONATHAN. How long will it be until you're asleep? How long will it be? You! Answer me! You—— Hullo, she's asleep already! Amazing, what?

[*The witch is lying back, with the upper part of her body against the table.*]

SAUL [*looking at her*]. I haven't slept for nights.



SAUL

JONATHAN. Just look at her, Marshal! I'd never have believed it!

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. I see—but perhaps she isn't really asleep.

JONATHAN. She looks as if she were dead!

THE MARSHAL OF THE LEFT WING. Does my gracious master now realize what he is doing? If word gets out that we are here, if it becomes known that we have done this thing, the enemy will overcome us. He is very near to us now—and the King, in the greatest danger, allows a barefooted peasant girl to prophesy to him!

SAUL. Yes. Unprecedented, isn't it? First I had all the witches burned, and now I myself consult a witch. . . . In the greatest danger: approaching the very end. It may be the end. Is that what you mean, or isn't it? Aside from that, do you think she'll bring him up? [*The Marshal of the Left Wing is silent.*] I asked you if you thought she'd bring—

THE MARSHAL OF THE LEFT WING. Him? No.

SAUL. No.

THE MARSHAL OF THE LEFT WING. No, gracious master.

SAUL. Why not? Perhaps you think ghosts don't exist. You don't, do you? What happens to the people who die every day? But you believe in a God, don't you? You believe in that, in God, even though no trace of His existence is visible in the world! The other one has left the world, gone, God knows where, and without him the world lies here as if it were his corpse. He must arise at any cost! But where is God? [*He blows over the palm of his hand.*] As if He had never been! Give me news about Him, my lord! Did you ever see Him? As a matter of fact He is none other than I, God, a human being, an animal, so far as I am concerned, with the strength of an animal. That is all—and my strength has gone out of me like a fire. Do you know what God is? An imaginary creature, a symbol, if you wish, of the longing for heaven which is in all creatures! That is God: a name, a figment of the brain, a nothing!

THE MARSHAL OF THE LEFT WING. Not quite enough, my lord. There is something superior to all that.

SAUL [*screaming at him*]. Where do you expect to get with your damned God? Why do you run after Him like a dog in heat? He whistles for you, I tell you, and He isn't there! I have built up His kingdom, I have borne it on my strong shoulders, I have fought more battles for Him than there are fingers on my hands, all for the greater glory of God; and now that I am crippled with gout as the result of long camping in the open, that my teeth are falling out, like those of an old hound, that my enemies are embattled against me, as near to me as you are, and I no longer know where to turn, do you believe that He will do something for me? I am God's King, hide and hair, and now there's no God there! I stand out above you all, the elect of God, a King for God by the will of God, but He has gone, and everything around me is empty. I grasp at the air, and I fall to the ground! . . . You are horrified, my lord, that I come here and allow a half-grown, dirty peasant wench to prophesy for me? I tell you the truth knows no bombast, no priests, no diadems! It speaks out of the mouths of the living, common people! Give me your God, and I will belong to God; but He has departed like the day which was done yesterday, and He is as little here as the day which will be to-morrow! For twenty years I was King, and sought for God more than any other man, because I was King, and what is a King without God? But God was not there, never since my anointing. That was an occasion which He should have honoured with His presence; but He went away, out of envy, out of anger, perhaps out of jealousy, because He can't stand kings; and I was King, I, all alone, I, all alone, for twenty years, and perhaps it was most kingly that I was King without God! Yes, I think it was more magnificent than anything else: to be one and illustrious. But now I am burned out and empty, and my strength is gone, spent, day by day, like spray in the wind, as I flung my power about. I no longer have the heart nor the arm to lift against an

SAUL

enemy only two spans high. . . . But if there is no God the world is still there, the tangible, the earth [*he stamps on it*], men, air, the clothes on my body, my hands, my hair! That is there! It moves from place to place! It has a relation to us! The gods are there, bodily, in the storm, in the sunlight, in fate, in the night, over everything! Gods! Spirits! Everything that is has its power, which we recognize as real and corporeal. Those who are yonder know what is yonder; those who are unseen know what happens in the unseen world; those who are dying can see into the future: that is fate. That girl there, the seeress, who lies asleep, that cow-maid, has, so they say, power over even the illustrious dead. They must arise, so that they may prophesy. They are the gods!

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING [*after a pause*]. Does my gracious master really believe it will succeed?

SAUL. Why not? She talked as if she were God a few moments ago. When I step on a dog's tail I hear the dog; but I don't hear God.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. It would be better to sleep, to gather your strength, to bathe, to let the horses rest. If my gracious lord's army should give battle to-morrow, then my lord will be lost. That is more important than God. My lord's eyelids are closing with weariness, but my lord stands here and speaks of God.

SAUL. I speak of Him upon whom everything depends. Did I say God? Perhaps we have no other word for Him. That is bad! I meant to say spirits! Spirits!

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Spirits are gods. It is all the same. Perhaps everything is God.

SAUL. The same? Everything? There is no way out from God?

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. I have told my master that there is something more urgent at the moment.

SAUL [*deciding*]. There is nothing more urgent than that which you call God. You don't understand that.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. No; not at all.

The enemy is hard upon us. He will attack in the morning. What is my gracious master accomplishing here?

SAUL. I wish to have Samuel! He must arise! He must prophesy! He must predict what will happen to-morrow! I myself have no more power against the enemy than an infant that reaches out for the air. He must give me a victory, otherwise I am lost. I have dissipated my strength in thirty battles. I have no more. I aimed at something beyond, at something outside of myself, at the spirits—if you wish, perhaps at God. I must reconcile myself with Him again. People say He wants to kill me: He has cast me out because I cast Him out. [*Proudly*] We must do one thing more. We have had Him questioned by the priests, and He has not replied. Perhaps He is here. Perhaps He is here in another form. We shall have Him speak. It is said He is everywhere. Why should He not be in such a sleeping woman? Let Him answer through Samuel. They say that Samuel is with him. . . . [*In a burst of anger*] What is that?

[*He observes how Jonathan has bent himself more and more over the witch, and is kissing her to his heart's content.*]

THE WITCH [*in her sleep*]. Stop it! Don't!

JONATHAN. Hush! Hush!

SAUL. What are you thinking of? What are you doing?

JONATHAN [*turning, laughing*]. I? Nothing.

SAUL. What were you doing with the wench?

JONATHAN. Nothing. I was waiting. For the spirit. But the spirit isn't coming. . . . She's a pretty girl, Father, and while I was looking at her, doing nothing but looking at her, I completely forgot. . . .

SAUL. Son, do you realize what you are doing, son? I am at the point of death! You too!

JONATHAN. Yes, it looks damnably as if we'll be biting the grass to-morrow, all of us together.

SAUL [*after an instant, to the Marshal of the Left Wing*]. Take his place!

JONATHAN. Leave me alone! I must hold her!

SAUL

SAUL [*screaming*]. Take his place! Do as I say! [*The Marshal of the Left Wing bows, and advances, when music is heard.*] What on earth is that? [*To the Marshal*] Stay where you are! [*He does. Quiet. Music.*] Do you hear it?

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Somebody is playing a tune. [*A pause.*] Perhaps it's one of the heralds outside the house.

SAUL. No. It comes from somewhere else. [*To the Marshal of the Left Wing*] Leave him alone. Come back here.

[*The Marshal returns.*]

JONATHAN. Look, Father! She's getting restless! She's starting something new! [*The witch moves in a cramp.*] What kind of music is that?

SAUL. Don't move! [*A pause.*] Well, well! Well! It's beginning.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Perhaps somebody is playing in front of the house. Shouldn't I find—

SAUL. Stay where you are, in the name of the devil!

JONATHAN. Look how she's trying to get loose, Father—how she's struggling! All of a sudden her strength has become gigantic, gigantic. . . . Did you see how she raised herself? What kind of—

SAUL. Hold her, I tell you! Hold her!

JONATHAN. Yes, but it isn't so easy!

SAUL. Be quiet! [*The music grows louder.*] Playing! Playing like—like David's. Where is David now? He played for me when I was unhappy. Wonderful! Wonderful! My heart grew lighter as he played, just as it is melting now—my heart, which was ice. My eyes were frozen, but when he played my soul was that of a lover, and my eyes were dewy with tears. So my soul is freeing itself now, and my eyes. Only music can burn as sweetly as the wounds given by kisses! [*A pause. Music.*] So David played before me, and if God was far away then music floated to me from him like the perfume of a beloved, like a wind heavy with the scent of blossoms, like the odour of the oil with which Samuel anointed me. How long since I have heard God?

Now, now, I feel as if He were here again, a great power that makes my hair rise, a presence that ripples over me like the silky curls of my queens, triumphant as the wind out of the folds of battle-flags! Is that God? Then let Him not become stronger, not more powerful, for even the remembrance of Him is too much for me. I have been so long without God!

*[Smoke comes from the ground.]*

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Smoke is rising!

JONATHAN. Father, she is trying to get away from me! Damnation! She has more strength than a man!

*[The witch writhes in severe cramps.]*

SAUL. Don't let her go! Don't let— *[The music becomes very loud.]* It is growing stronger, it is swelling out—

THE MARSHAL OF THE LEFT WING. More smoke!

SAUL. Don't move! *[He pulls him back.]*

JONATHAN. God damn it, I can't hold her any more!

SAUL. It will happen soon now! Very soon! God! God!

*[The music becomes deafeningly loud. Samuel stands in the smoke.]*

THE WITCH *[screaming]*. Saul! Why did you deceive me? You are indeed Saul! *[She falls back and lies motionless.]*

SAUL *[falls to his knees. The music dies away quickly. There is quiet for a time. Then Saul speaks in a totally different voice]*. Woman! What did you see?

THE WITCH. I saw gods ascending out of the earth!

SAUL. What kind of gods?

THE WITCH. An old man comes up; and he is covered with a mantle.

SAUL *[hoarsely]*. Is that he? Speak to him!

THE WITCH. Speak yourself. Look at him.

SAUL *[looks up; raises his hands]*. Holy master of my youth!

SAMUEL. Saul!

SAUL. Yes, master, master!

SAMUEL. Is it you who kneels there?

SAUL. It is I.

SAMUEL. Do you answer me in the name of Saul?

SAUL. I do, master.

SAMUEL. You, you are not he.

SAUL. Not, master?

SAMUEL. You are not he. You are not Saul.

SAUL. Who else then, master, other than myself?

SAMUEL [*impatien<sup>t</sup>* and *sudden*]. Another. A stranger. Not the anointed. He has gone out from you. You are not you. No longer. You are the spirit who inhabits Saul. My consecrated oil still shines on your brow, but it is no longer your brow. I anointed a carcass. . . . What do you want? Why did you bring me up? [*A pause.*] Quickly! Speak! What do you want?

SAUL [*wringing his hands*]. Do not be impatient, holy master, how otherwise shall I speak? Master, help me!

SAMUEL. Help you?

SAUL. Or I am lost. It goes badly with me, badly.

SAMUEL. Badly indeed. Go on. What more? What do you want now? It is the end. What more can there be?

SAUL. The enemy is so near that his next step will be on my heart. No longer can I keep the army in the field. God has departed from me, and answers me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams. Therefore I have called you that you may make known to me what I shall do.

SAMUEL. Why do you call on me? Why do you wish to speak with me as if you were still Saul? Who are you? I do not know you. In spite of this will you ask me why God has deserted you? Will it console you if I speak to you as if you were a sick horse? Do you ask support for your last hours? Rather sleep, if you can; eat, and drink to yourself. Do you wish to know what is to be? Why should you, if you are at the end? I have spoken. I depart. I am weary here, and the breath of your nostrils is a stink to me. I have nothing more to do with you. God will seize the kingdom out of your hand, and give it to your harpist,

David. Because you fell away from God he will do likewise by you. He will deliver your host and your camp into the hands of the Philistines. To-morrow you shall die. To-morrow you and your sons shall be with me.

*[Saul falls at full length, speechless. The Marshals rush to him, Jonathan also, releasing the hands of the witch. The witch, unrestrained, screams loudly. The apparition disappears. The music, which has been heard softly throughout, becomes deafening and breaks off abruptly. The Marshals and Jonathan occupy themselves with Saul. The witch rolls to the ground, regains consciousness, groans, moves towards Saul painfully.]*

THE WITCH. You are Saul! Why did you deceive me?  
*[Saul moves; stares out in front of him.]*

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Come to your senses, gracious master! Recognize us!

JONATHAN. Father, look at me! *[He shakes him.]*

SAUL *[draggingly]*. What was it?

JONATHAN. Nothing. Nonsense. The devil that is drawn on the wall. Perhaps he was here just now.

SAUL. Away! We ride! Help me!  
*[A pause.]*

JONATHAN. What is the matter? What is the matter?  
*[They lift him, but he collapses again.]*

SAUL. I have eaten nothing for two days.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. Lift the master! Come, gracious master!

*[They lead him to the table and seat him at it.]*  
THE WITCH *[following]*. Right away, Saul.

THE MARSHAL OF THE LEFT WING. We have nothing with us.

THE WITCH. Here! There! *[She pushes a dish across the table.]* There is your food, Saul.

THE MARSHAL OF THE RIGHT WING. That stuff there? Take it away! Get out!

SAUL *[after pointing to it with a protracted gesture of the hand]*.



SAUL

Give it to me—your food—so that I may remain alive—  
until to-morrow. [*They put the dish on his knees.*] A spoon.

[*The witch gives it to him. He takes it. He stares.*]

THE WITCH. Saul!

SAUL. I . . .

THE WITCH. Eat now, Saul!

SAUL. Yes.

[*He does not move.*]

THE WITCH [*takes hold of his shoulder. He does not resist,  
but gives in like a tired peasant*]. Eat, Saul.

[*He eats.*]

SAUL. Yes.

CURTAIN



because its psychology is so interesting to the Anglo-Saxon mind. What English or American woman, placed in the position that confronts Countess Thoroczky, would melt and be tender-hearted towards the individual who has so outrageously insulted her? He explains that he is the victim of a species of sentimental self-hypnosis, an explanation which is credible or the reverse according to the personality of the actor who plays the part, and the Countess is so greatly moved that we should not be surprised to learn that she enters into a liaison with Johann a week or ten days later. We may, if we choose, interpret her final lines to hint at something of the kind.

Our first reaction is that her psychology is typically foreign; but our second is to speculate whether or not we ourselves are moving towards a similar state of ultra-broad-mindedness.

Attila von Orbók has had a distinguished career. Born at Pozsony (now Bratislava) in 1888, son of a mathematician and physicist and grandson of an eminent theologian, he took a doctorate at the University of Paris, and became political editor of a Budapest newspaper. At the outbreak of the War he was called to arms, but was quickly transferred to the Governmental Press Bureau, and was subsequently appointed Press Attaché to the Hungarian Embassy in Bern. When Hungary became independent he was elected to the first Legislature.

He has concerned himself principally with literature since 1922, his three-act comedy, *The Comet*, being well known to English-speaking audiences. His other full-length works include *Mein Soehnehen*, *Ich scheide mich nicht*, *Die Braut aus Wien*, *Der Scheidungsprozess Lyvia's*, and *Der Arzt der Toten*. Among his one-act plays are *Frau Potiphar*, *Der Einbrecher*, *Der Mörder*, *Der gute Rat*, and *Ein diskreter Junge*, the last-named being the original of *With Discretion*.

At present Orbók is political editor and dramatic critic of the Budapest *Fuggetlenség*.

*Hungary*

WITH DISCRETION

A COMEDY

By ATTILA VON ORBÓK

*Adapted by PERCIVAL WILDE from the German version  
of WILHELM ZOLTÁN*

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## CHARACTERS

JOHANN NAGY, *a bank employee*  
STEFAN BORBÉLY, *his friend*  
COUNTESS THOROCZEKAY  
THE HOUSEKEEPER

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## WITH DISCRETION

*Johann Nagy's study, in his apartment, is a well-furnished room. There are doors at the right and the left. There is a writing-table, a small sofa, bookcases, smoking-tables. On the writing-table are a small photograph of Nagy and three large ones of the Countess.*

*The stage is empty at the rise of the curtain. The doorbell rings. The housekeeper enters through the left-hand door, which opens into a bedroom, crosses the stage, and goes out through the right-hand door, which opens on a hall. Presently she returns, showing in the Countess Thorockay, who is beautifully dressed and extremely angry.*

THE COUNTESS. So this is where Johann Nagy, the bank employee, lives?

THE HOUSEKEEPER. Yes, ma'am. . . . I am his housekeeper. [*She stares at the Countess.*]

THE COUNTESS. Please tell me: does Herr Nagy write for the newspapers? Has he a pen-name, by any chance?

THE HOUSEKEEPER. Not so far as I know, though it's possible. He subscribes to *Modern Poultry*. That's an illustrated magazine.

THE COUNTESS. At what time does he come home?

THE HOUSEKEEPER. Six, ma'am. He's always right on the dot. He'll be here in ten minutes. Won't you sit down, ma'am?

THE COUNTESS [*sitting with her back to the writing-table*]. Thank you. . . . Tell me, is Herr Nagy married?

THE HOUSEKEEPER. My lady, he is completely and entirely single.

THE COUNTESS. "My lady"? You know who I am?

THE HOUSEKEEPER. Yes, indeed, my lady. Your ladyship is the Countess Thoroczka, if I'm not mistaken.

THE COUNTESS. Do you know me from the stage?

THE HOUSEKEEPER. Yes, my lady.

THE COUNTESS. But I have done no acting since my marriage, three years ago.

THE HOUSEKEEPER. I remember very well what a great success your ladyship had. I also was connected with the theatre.

THE COUNTESS. How so?

THE HOUSEKEEPER. My sister's husband used to be a masseur in a public bath. His sister married a Court crier whose uncle was a fireman, and who was on duty in the theatres alternate nights. I used to get tickets from him.

THE COUNTESS. And you haven't forgotten me in three years?

THE HOUSEKEEPER. Your ladyship was such a great actress! [*She smiles.*] And then, Herr Nagy speaks of you often.

THE COUNTESS. He speaks of me? Then it's possible that he's met me somewhere.

THE HOUSEKEEPER [*laughing*]. Is your ladyship joking? Of course he's met you—and you ask me if he's married! As if I didn't know what's going on!

THE COUNTESS. What is going on? I'm really curious. I, you see, know nothing, and I came here expressly to find out.

THE HOUSEKEEPER [*still laughing*]. Your ladyship hasn't forgotten how to act, I see! You play your part as convincingly as if you really didn't know Herr Nagy.

THE COUNTESS [*taken aback*]. What do you mean? I *don't* know him; or, if I do, I don't remember him. It's possible, though, that I never laid eyes on him.

THE HOUSEKEEPER. I understand that your ladyship is pleased to pretend—for the sake of propriety, perhaps. But I know everything, because I live right here, and Herr Nagy is very proud of your ladyship's acquaintance, and so happy that he almost explodes.

WITH DISCRETION

THE COUNTESS [*astonished*]. Proud? Happy?

THE HOUSEKEEPER. I've never seen anything like it. [*She goes to the writing-table.*] Look! Here are his photographs of you. I often catch him looking at them as if they were a seven-days' wonder. But your ladyship is really so pretty! [*She pauses and smiles.*] I also know to whom the white silk nightdress in the bedroom belongs!

THE COUNTESS [*rises, crosses to the table, and looks at the photographs*]. A white silk nightdress? And photographs? They're actually photographs of me! That one in the middle—is that a picture of him?

THE HOUSEKEEPER. It isn't so bad that you shouldn't recognize it! He's really better-looking than that, isn't he, Countess?

THE COUNTESS. How should I know? I never met him. But what is this? An inscription on my picture! [*She reads it aloud, and becomes furious.*] "To my dear Johann, from Irene." [*She reads another.*] "I shall be true to you for ever. Irene." [*Another, white with anger.*] "Always devotedly, your little dog." Oh, his little dog! [*Almost crying with fury*] That I should be his little dog! I! Oh, the cad! Now I understand! He tells everybody that— [*She interrupts herself suddenly, and turns on the housekeeper.*] Herr Johann Nagy is a contemptible scoundrel!

THE HOUSEKEEPER [*frightened*]. But, your ladyship! I don't understand why you are so angry!

THE COUNTESS. You don't, do you? He's lied to you too, I suppose! But he'll pay for it!

THE HOUSEKEEPER [*almost weeping*]. Your ladyship, he's one of the finest men I know.

THE COUNTESS. A fine man, is he? If he were I wouldn't have to come here! Bear in mind that I never met him in my life! . . . Recently a good many of my acquaintances have been mentioning his name—and I couldn't understand why they snickered every time they spoke of him. I investigated. I learned he was a bank employee, and that he lived in this house. I thought he might once



have been a newspaper man, and that I'd remember him from the days when I used to act. It was possible that he had written under another name, and that's why I asked you about it. I thought he might still be connected with the theatre, and might be spreading slanders about me, as has happened a good many times when an actress marries into the nobility. I wanted to talk to him, because my husband is insanely jealous, and if he learns that an unknown bank employee is bandying my name about——

THE HOUSEKEEPER. Oh, your ladyship, he worships you!

THE COUNTESS. A nice kind of worship, I must say! And now I too know what's going on. I never met him in my life—but he goes about trumpeting that we're in love with each other! He compromises me, gets hold of photographs of me, writes on them that I'm his little dog, and signs my name to it! I won't tolerate it! The Count will settle things for me! It's true that he's old, but he's a dead shot, and he'll challenge him!

THE HOUSEKEEPER [*in an agony*]. Are you really serious, my lady? I can't believe it! Herr Nagy is so head over heels in love with your ladyship that he acts like a crazy man. Sometimes he dances for joy; sometimes he's as gloomy as if he were being led to the gallows. Only yesterday he got out the white silk nightdress and spoke to it in the loveliest language!

THE COUNTESS. To the nightdress?

THE HOUSEKEEPER. Yes, your ladyship. He said that when your ladyship wore it you were as beautiful as the "Menus de Vilo." He always compares your ladyship to the "Menus de Vilo."

THE COUNTESS. And he says I wore the nightdress? Well, he'll pay for that!

THE HOUSEKEEPER. In God's name, my lady! You won't tell the Count about it? That would be awful! Herr Nagy is such a good, easygoing man! He's the only son of a widowed mother——

WITH DISCRETION

THE COUNTESS. The man who slanders an innocent woman deserves no mercy.

THE HOUSEKEEPER. I don't know why he did it, but I'm sure he had nothing wrong in mind. He's *so* good-hearted! He can't pass a beggar without giving him a coin! . . . I've been working for him for seven years, and in all that time he's never spoken to me harshly. [*She weeps.*] Please don't do anything to him, dear, dear Countess!

THE COUNTESS [*a very little softened*]. He should be whipped.

THE HOUSEKEEPER. Believe me, he's a fine gentleman! Perhaps God took away his reason. That sort of thing often happens with the upper classes.

THE COUNTESS. I don't pretend to understand it. But Johann Nagy must not slander me any more!

THE HOUSEKEEPER. Perhaps, perhaps, he went a step too far. But this morning he told me that yesterday he dined with your ladyship at Gundel's, in the Stadtwäldchen,<sup>1</sup> and the day before yesterday he went to Gerbeaud's with a bouquet, and said your ladyship would be waiting for him. And he danced round like a child while he was telling me!

THE COUNTESS. The man is completely insane.

THE HOUSEKEEPER. Perhaps, but his intentions are good, I'm sure. It would be terrible if you told your husband! It would be quite enough, my lady, if you spoke to him yourself. I often scold him, and he almost cries, and he always does what I tell him. He's a very gentle, mild, harmless man.

THE COUNTESS [*chuckling*]. Poor, harmless man! . . . I'll speak to him—or better, I'll write him. It's his good luck that I met you here. [*She turns to the door at the right.*] Good day.

THE HOUSEKEEPER [*kissing her hand thankfully*]. Thank you, my lady! Thank you!

THE COUNTESS. Never let him know that I was here. Give me your word.

<sup>1</sup> City Park.

ATTILA VON ORBÓK

THE HOUSEKEEPER. I swear it by Saint Jeremiah! Trust me, your ladyship! [*She opens the door for her.*]

THE COUNTESS. Not a word to Herr Nagy! I'll write.

THE HOUSEKEEPER [*in a sudden panic*]. Holy Virgin protect us! He's coming! He's here! I hear him opening the letter-box!

THE COUNTESS. How can I get out? Is there another way out?

THE HOUSEKEEPER. No; unfortunately there isn't . . . [*A pause.*]

THE COUNTESS [*suddenly*]. Where is the bedroom?

THE HOUSEKEEPER. The other door . . .

THE COUNTESS. Not a word that I'm here! You understand?

THE HOUSEKEEPER. I have sworn, and my uncle works for a priest! . . . But go easy with him, your ladyship!

THE COUNTESS. We'll see!

[*She goes into the bedroom. The housekeeper sighs, relieved. There is a short pause.*]

JOHANN [*enters. He is in a good humour. He has a letter which he reads rapidly, and then crushes in his hand*]. Oh, good evening, Frau Haringás. What's new?

THE HOUSEKEEPER. Nothing in particular.

JOHANN. How good it smells here! Have you, by any chance, been using perfume?

THE HOUSEKEEPER. Oh, no! I never use it.

JOHANN. But I smell it!

THE HOUSEKEEPER. You're in a good humour, Herr Nagy.

JOHANN. Certainly I'm in a good humour! [*He looks at the photographs.*] She wrote me, my Venus de Milo! She'll meet me at the little pastry-shop in the Festung<sup>1</sup> at seven sharp to-night! I won't have supper at home. . . . But you may make me a cup of chocolate, anyhow.

THE HOUSEKEEPER. Yes, sir. [*Nervously*] Yes, sir. Er

<sup>1</sup> Fortifications. The reference is to the ancient fortifications of Budapest, obsolete for many years.

. . . the photographs: don't you think it's wrong to display them here? To let your friends see them? Some harm might come of it.

JOHANN. What harm? At the worst my friends will blow up with envy. You don't understand, Frau Háringás, that ever since my friends saw me with the Countess they've had the greatest respect for me. They look up to me as if I were a demigod. Even the president of the bank says good-morning to me.

THE HOUSEKEEPER. But if he met the Count——

JOHANN. That old imbecile? A married man never learns anything about his wife. . . . Do hurry up with my chocolate, like a good soul.

THE HOUSEKEEPER. I'm worried, Herr Nagy——

JOHANN. I'm hungry, Frau Háringás. What's got into you?

*[She nods, visibly frightened, and goes off by the right-hand door. Johann stares after her, shrugs his shoulders, shakes his head. He gives it up, and, settling himself comfortably in an armchair, takes up a newspaper and lights a cigarette, his back to the doors. There is a pause, during which it grows darker.]*

THE COUNTESS *[opens the bedroom door quietly. She is wearing the white silk nightdress]*. Who is there?

JOHANN *[thunderstruck, unable to move]*. What under the sun——!

THE COUNTESS *[on the threshold, sweetly]*. Won't Johann notice his little dog? *[He thrusts a finger into his ear and moves it about as if his ears are ringing.]* Perhaps the surprise doesn't please you?

JOHANN *[looks round, and almost falls out of his chair in amazement]*. Merciful heavens, the Countess!

THE COUNTESS. What countess? Since when am I a countess to you? I am your Irene, your little dog——

JOHANN *[jumping up]*. How does your ladyship come here?

THE COUNTESS. Why are you joking with me, Johann? Last night at Gundel's you didn't think I'd dare visit you to-day. You're delighted, aren't you?

JOHANN. I don't understand! Is it really the Countess? And why are you here—in a nightdress? What do you want?

THE COUNTESS [*delighted*]. Is it really the Countess—and what do I want? How can you ask your sweetheart such questions? You were so loving to me at Gundel's last night. Have you forgotten that?

JOHANN. Excuse me, but last night I played billiards at the Plattensee *café* until after one o'clock!

THE COUNTESS. Please, please, don't trifle with me! You'll end up by pretending that you've forgotten the beautiful bouquet you gave me at Gerbeaud's the day before yesterday in the afternoon—my only treasure!

JOHANN. The day before yesterday I spent the whole afternoon watching a football game with my friend Stefan Borbély.

THE COUNTESS. You're worse than absent-minded: you're forgetful! Are you upset because we have a rendezvous to-night in the Festung, and because I came here in spite of it? You see, my husband, the Count, bored me to distraction, and I couldn't wait until seven o'clock to see you, you irresistible man! [*She pushes him into the armchair, and sits on the arm.*] Tell me, did my letter please you?

JOHANN. What letter?

THE COUNTESS. The letter I wrote you this morning, naturally. You must have received it by now.

JOHANN [*taking a letter from his pocket*]. I received this letter, and your ladyship didn't write it.

THE COUNTESS [*taking it out of his hands*]. Let me see it. Of course I wrote this letter! Look at it! Read it! [*She reads, with an arm round his neck.*] "My own Johann: To-night, on the stroke of seven, I'll be waiting for you at the little pastry-shop in the Festung. Don't be late! With a thousand kisses, your faithful Irene." [*She gives him the*

*letter.*] It's in my own handwriting. Read it yourself, you little absent-minded Don Juan.

JOHANN. The letter says, "Dear Sir: Take notice! It is two years since you paid me anything on account, and it is disgraceful that you have paid me nothing since. I am making a final demand for payment, and I warn you that if you continue to strut around in my trousers, which you have not paid for, I shall bring suit and iron my money out of you. Hoffman." He says, "Iron my money out of you." My tailor wrote that. I know his style.

THE COUNTESS [*cries out, and collapses into Johann's lap*]. My poor little Johann! Love has driven you completely mad!

JOHANN [*in painful confusion*]. Please let me go. This isn't at all proper. . . . Why are you crying? I don't know you. If this goes any further I'll jump right out of the window!

THE COUNTESS [*sobbing*]. It's awful, it's crushing, that you don't recognize me! Me, your sweetheart! Love has completely destroyed your memory! Happiness—the happiness of being with me so much—has shattered your reason!

JOHANN. You were with me? With *me*?

THE COUNTESS. Of course! With you, with you!

JOHANN. With me, with you, with him, with us, with them——

THE COUNTESS. My own Johann, I beg you, come to your senses! Look at me hard! Look at me! Perhaps if you don't recognize me you'll recognize this nightdress. It was you who bought it.

JOHANN. Yes, indeed. I bought it at Holzer's.

THE COUNTESS. You bought it for me! We picked it out together after you, you irresistible man, had conquered me, and I had promised that I'd—I'd visit you in your apartment for just a few minutes. [*Picking coyly at the buttons on his vest*] That was why we picked it out together. Isn't that true? Now do you remember?

ATTILA VON ORBÓK

JOHANN. It isn't true. I bought it alone!

THE COUNTESS. Darling, you're making my head whirl! We bought it together last February! You were with me in the shop!

JOHANN. With me? With me?

THE COUNTESS. With you! With you!

JOHANN. With me, with you, with her, with us, with them . . . It's enough to drive one crazy!

THE COUNTESS. Now who gave you the photographs, if not I?

JOHANN. No, indeed! I paid plenty for them at Strelisky's!

THE COUNTESS. You bought them? Then who wrote on them, if not I? The inscriptions are in my handwriting! I wrote on this picture, "To my dear Johann, from Irene," and on this one, "I shall be true to you for ever. Irene." Can't you remember that I gave you this one after spending that lovely night with you during the Christmas season, when the ground was covered with snow? The fire flickered red on the hearth. You turned out the lights, gathered me into your lap, and told me about your boyhood days, and about your good, widowed mother, whose only consolation you are.

JOHANN. That sounds correct, but the inscriptions were written on the pictures by a stenographer who works in the bank. I had her do it for me one evening while we were working together alone. It's a fact that I told her about my mother——

THE COUNTESS. It was *I* who was with you. I inscribed my own pictures, and it was I whom you told about your mother.

JOHANN. Really? You were there? Then you are Sarah Schwartz?

THE COUNTESS. Certainly not! I am the Countess Thorockay, your sweetheart, your devoted little dog, whom you embraced so lovingly last night.

JOHANN. It seems to me that you have changed.

WITH DISCRETION

THE COUNTESS [*rising*]. I was in love, and I was afraid of becoming stout, so I went on a diet.

JOHANN [*also rising*]. And you, the Countess Thorockay, spent your days masquerading as Sarah Schwartz in the bank?

THE COUNTESS. What nonsense! I thought you'd come to yourself, and now you've had another lapse. Come here. [*She sits on the sofa.*] Lay your head on my lap. You'll feel better if I stroke it for you.

JOHANN. No! No! Please go! Leave me in peace, or I'll go mad! Please go!

THE COUNTESS [*sobbing*]. What did you say? Are you casting me off? You didn't talk like that when you begged me to become your mistress! But all men are like that. We give our all, and the moment we begin to tire you your ingratitude knows no bounds.

JOHANN. That's right. I'm tired of you! I've had enough of you! A woman who is Sarah Schwartz during the day and the Countess Thorockay at night—or the other way round—I'll be a raving maniac in a minute!

THE COUNTESS [*drawing herself up proudly*]. So you presume to talk to me like that? You indulge in cheap humour? Very well! I'll go, but I won't come back! And if you ever mention my name again God help you!

[*She goes into the bedroom.*]

JOHANN [*falling into a chair and holding his head in his hands*]. Who knows? Who knows? . . . Perhaps—perhaps—

THE HOUSEKEEPER [*enters, bringing the chocolate*]. Here is the chocolate. What's the matter with you, Herr Nagy? You look so pale and tired! Don't you feel well?

JOHANN. Frau Háringás, all your life you've been a pious, God-fearing woman. Put your hand on your heart.

THE HOUSEKEEPER. All right. I've put it there.

JOHANN. Tell me who is my sweetheart? Sarah Schwartz or the Countess Thorockay?

THE HOUSEKEEPER. How should I know? I don't



sleep here. This is the first time you ever mentioned Sarah Schwartz. You have always spoken of the Countess.

JOHANN. Well, who's in the bedroom now?

THE HOUSEKEEPER. Nobody.

JOHANN. You didn't see the Countess when she came in?

THE HOUSEKEEPER. Not a soul has been here all day, Herr Nagy.

JOHANN. Well, then, something is wrong with me. My head aches dreadfully. [*The Countess re-enters in street costume.*] Now look! Who is that? The woman there?

THE HOUSEKEEPER. I saw nobody.

[*She goes out at the left.*]

JOHANN [*raising his hand to his head*]. I understand! I understand!

THE COUNTESS. Johann, Herr Nagy, are you still cruel to me?

JOHANN. Countess, forgive me. I am guilty. It was a childish prank, a stupid thing to do, but I regret it now, believe me, and I have atoned.

THE COUNTESS. H'm! You're very indulgent with yourself. Perhaps amusing yourself with a woman's honour is more than just a childish prank.

JOHANN. Countess, how did you learn of it?

THE COUNTESS. That is beside the point. You took pains to give the matter the greatest possible publicity.

JOHANN. Believe me, Countess, never in my wildest dreams did it ever occur to me that a word about the pathetic little romance of my life would reach the heights which you inhabit.

THE COUNTESS. Romance? Is it romantic for a braggart to slander the virtue of a woman?

JOHANN. You are right. You are right about everything. Nevertheless it *is* a romance, the romance of my small, wretched life. Who is to blame if you too play a part in it—a decisive and a disastrous part?

THE COUNTESS. Oh!

WITH DISCRETION

JOHANN. That's right, make fun of me! You have every right to! You have a right to do anything at all! Shall I tell you that my infatuation has lasted for years, and has become greater and greater? It seemed impossible that I should ever meet you. I couldn't believe that some day I might tell you, trembling, stuttering, that I loved you, that at night I prayed to you, hopelessly and desperately! I tried to tell myself that you might not be unattainable. In the beginning I said that to myself alone; later on, to convince myself, I said it aloud in the presence of the few persons who constitute my circle of friends, and who are far removed from your social circles. I delighted in talking about you, in inventing a thousand sweet little episodes, in imagining that you and I were incredibly, immortally, undyingly—*[he chokes; then, gently]*—in love.

THE COUNTESS *[much affected; gently]*. Poor little Johann Nagy! Poor, stupid Johann . . .

JOHANN. Don't be angry with me, Countess: not too angry.

THE COUNTESS. No, little Johann, I shall not be angry. On the contrary, I shall tell you—I don't know why I should—that it was pleasant for me to hear what you said. Perhaps, if you had chanced to say it sooner, much sooner . . .

JOHANN. What then?

\* THE COUNTESS. Nothing, my dear Johann. Nothing! *[She offers him her hand.]* Good-bye.

JOHANN *[kissing it]*. Countess—

THE COUNTESS. It is late, my dear Johann. I must go. Good-bye.

*[She goes. Johann shows her out; returns alone. He goes to the desk, sits, stares at the pictures. The housekeeper enters from the left.]*

JOHANN. Did you see her, Frau Haringás? What a beautiful creature! How aristocratically beautiful!

THE HOUSEKEEPER. I saw nobody. I overheard what was being said—naturally—but when I opened my eyes I didn't see a living soul.

ATTILA VON ORBÓK

JOHANN. What did you say? You didn't see the Countess? Right in this room? As she came out? As she spoke? You didn't see her?

THE HOUSEKEEPER. Nobody has been here. Believe me, Herr Nagy, you're imagining things.

JOHANN. Really? [*He sighs.*] Well, it's possible—possible . . .

STEFAN [*rushes in, wearing an overcoat and a hat*]. How are you, old man? Good evening, Frau Háríngás.

THE HOUSEKEEPER. Good evening, Herr Borbély. You come at just the right time . . .

STEFAN. You bet I do! Johann, this time I've caught you! To tell you the truth, I never believed that the famous, beautiful Countess Thoroczkay was your mistress. But now I've seen her, in the very act of slipping out of your rooms! [*He offers him his hand.*] My congratulations!

JOHANN [*striking his hand*]. Are you crazy? What countess are you talking about? I don't know any countesses. Nobody has been here—and if you mention the name of a certain lady again I'll shoot you like a dog! [*He storms out.*]

STEFAN [*staring after him*]. What's got into him, anyhow? He doesn't know her? I saw her leaving this apartment!

THE HOUSEKEEPER. Herr Nagy is a man of delicate feelings. When it's a question of a woman's honour, he stands for no joking.

STEFAN [*takes up one of the photographs; smiles eloquently*]. Well, if I were as lucky as he I wouldn't joke about it either.

CURTAIN

## France

### THE POST-WAR DRAMA

IN his *The Craftsmanship of the One-Act Play*, published in 1923, the editor wrote:

From the poetic drama of Coppée to the 'thriller' of de Lorde, Francheville, and Garin; from the *proverbe* of de Musset to the naturalistic *scène de famille* of Méténier and his followers; from the earliest *vaudeville*, *mêlée de chant* to the present light comedy, often unblushing and unashamed, the contribution of the French has been vast, original, and significant.

It is again time to speak of France. Thirteen years have elapsed, and the drama in other countries has evolved greatly; but French dramatic writing of 1936 does not differ perceptibly from that of 1926, 1916, or even 1900.

It would be unjust to say that the French have not advanced. 'Advance' is a relative term. It may be that the rest of the world has gone astray, while only the French have adhered to the true faith. But it is undeniable that differences between French and non-French tastes have been almost incredibly accentuated.

Non-French audiences and non-French critics demand what must be termed a 'modern' technique, with whatever that implies. They object to obtrusive exposition, preferring that it be embedded in the action. They find type characterization unsatisfactory. They detect insufficient or illogical motivation. They deprecate the effort, in comedy, to be funny at all times quite as strongly as they disapprove of an effort, in serious writing, to lend false accents to situations by means of theatricalism. They consider the soliloquy and the aside out of date, and while they will occasionally journey to remote theatres to witness revivals in which these

devices occur, together with the bustle and the crinoline, they will not tolerate them in new works which do not intentionally aim at artificiality. Most of all they object to dialogue which is not true to life: the speech which is written so that an actor may rant; the long-winded self-analysis in which a character dissects the emotions which, if he only felt them, would leave him wordless. They will not tolerate 'staginess.'

They no longer raise their eyebrows at the sight of the words 'experimental drama,' 'constructivism,' 'mechanistic,' and 'expressionism.' They are no longer amazed when a scene is changed in a few seconds. Indeed, they expect modern stagecraft to be used when an action can best be shown by a rapid succession of scenes. They have learned of the magic that can be achieved by lighting; they appreciate the setting which suggests as much and more than it shows; they enjoy the play which leaves—or makes them think it leaves—something to the intelligence and the imagination of its auditors. Whether the drama be fantastic or realistic, they have new and flexible standards by which they appraise it. They feel that there have been advances, they have become open-minded, and they are ready to meet half-way the dramatist who offers them the great adventure of the theatre in a new form.

These things have come to pass—but not in France. The French play has remained true, generally speaking, to the technique, the stagecraft, and the thematic material of its ancestors. The theatre is artificial. The convention which permits an audience to see through a fourth wall is artificial. The French do not disguise those artificialities. They are honest about them. If the play is make-believe life, then it may use make-believe psychology. If it is sham, then everything in it may be sham. The innovations of recent years have left the French unmoved. "As far as some of the finest French authors are concerned," writes Frank Vernon, "Ibsen might never have lived."

The editor would go farther. Present-day drama in the

English-speaking countries, in Central Europe, in Russia, in Scandinavia, shows not only the influence of Ibsen, which has become fundamental, but it also shows the influences of Strindberg and Chekhov, writers whose plays, based on new principles, have led to the composition of works surpassing their own. These influences too the French have largely rejected. H.-R. Lenormand must be called Strindbergian: but instead of using the psychotic as a gate to a profounder drama, as Eugene O'Neill and Georg Kaiser have done, he appears to consider the abnormal an end in itself. Charles Vildrac is unquestionably a Chekhovian, hence more esteemed abroad than at home. Simon Gantillon, André Obey, Marcel Pagnol, Denys Amiel, and Edouard Bourdet may be called moderns; but not one of them has been accorded a chair in the Academy.

There are many reasons why France clings to conventions which are considered obsolete elsewhere.

The French drama looks back upon a glorious past. For hundreds of years great names have succeeded each other. Molière, Corneille, and Racine stand at the side of Shakespeare. But while the English-speaking dramatist is content to admire Shakespeare without seeking to imitate him, many French authors consider it their patriotic duty to work in the traditions crystallized by their own immortals.

National pride, always great, has been increased by the surge of nationalistic feelings which followed the War. Had Ibsen, Chekhov, and Strindberg been French their innovations might have been accepted. Had not the most significant improvements in stagecraft come from Germany and Russia they might have been welcomed. But, originating elsewhere, they have been looked upon as un-French, and the French who love to lead, who consider their own drama the greatest in the world, are unwilling to learn from foreigners. They have their own models, and, what is more important, they have their own audiences, which remain intensely loyal to them.

Therefore the French dramatist sticks to his guns. He writes, as it were, for an audience which is blind, and must be addressed solely through its ears. The more compelling his action the surer he is to punctuate it with incredibly long speeches, so that his actors may indulge in analyses unknown to life. No matter how emergent his situation the participants in it will pause to hurl great masses of eloquence at each other. A young man of no particular education may be depended upon to possess enough oratorical ability to grace any cart-tail. A really cultured character will express himself in solid pages.

'Yes' and 'no' are the least-used words in the vocabularies of many French writers. To the dramatist of the old tradition, and he is as abundant in the youngest generation as among the seniors, the part is more important than the whole. The speech is the thing, more important than the situation, more important than the act, more important than the play. Preliminary exposition is lengthy, since it introduces speeches. The soliloquy and the aside are permissible—even desirable—for they introduce more speeches. Logical and psychological weaknesses may be covered up—by speeches.

It is important to point out that the long speech is unobjectionable—in the proper place. *Hymn to the Rising Sun* is almost a monologue, and the Captain's loquaciousness is in order. In *Saul* the author deliberately brings his action to a halt, and allows Saul to speak at length. That too is proper. Whatever is in accordance with life is defensible. But the French style of introducing prolixity for the sake of prolixity, of answering one long speech with another, and of placing more emphasis, in general, on the language of the play than on the play itself is contrary to the principles of modern technique.

The critics keep the tradition alive. Of the undistinguished first play of an eminent novelist one of them writes, "The dialogue, full of enchanting images, is enough to make the work delicious and highly worthy of the Comédie

Française." Another: "The dialogue is brilliant, metaphorical. . . ." A third: "His dialogue blazes with a thousand fires. It dazzles. . . . Everything, perhaps, in this display of precious gems is not of equal value. But the fact remains that often, very often, almost always, he offers us marvellous imagery."

These ecstatic notices were called forth by a two-act play in prose, whose high-light is a telephone call to Paris from Chile, costing, we are told, 3,500 francs. We note that the heroine begins the second act by reading aloud some two hundred words of a letter she is writing to her lover. She rings for a servant, exchanges a dozen speeches with her, and resumes writing—and reading aloud. She interrupts herself to soliloquize at length. The servant re-enters with a letter from the lover. She reads *that* aloud. Again the servant enters, this time to introduce an American caller bearing the good old Anglo-Saxon name of "Miss Dorotheé Squirrel." Miss Squirrel declares that she prefers Frenchmen to Americans. "The Frenchman gives you a little present every day, a bunch of violets, or a bun with your name on it in icing," while the American "only gives you a million dollars, once a year," and the play continued to what the critics agreed was an enthusiastic reception.

And this took place in the year of grace 1932, in the most important theatre in Paris, a city which may boast more first-rate literary talent than any other in the world, and whose writers, within the limitations imposed by themselves, have given us an uncountable number of masterpieces.

The French one-act play is in a slightly better position than the two-act, destined almost invariably for local consumption, or the full-length work. It is frequently translated, hence is more sensitive to foreign criticism. It aims at an immediate effect, hence cannot easily cover structural weaknesses with oratory. It lacks intermissions during which critics may agree that it is "metaphorical." It must finish saying whatever it has to say in twenty or thirty



minutes. Yet unpardonable turgidities occur when it attempts to be literary.

Here is Mr Vernon's rendering of a speech from Jean-Jacques Bernard's *Le Secret d'Arvers*, a highly regarded work first produced in 1926:

FONTANEY: My dear Arvers, it is the saddest story of the century. I swear it on the honour of a Legitimist that the year 1830 would have still been a beautiful year if it had only witnessed the fall of Charles X. Contemplate it: the beauteous muse of the Arsenal could have married with any man she wished. Nymph of Romanticism, she could have become its goddess. I do not mourn my own loss. What am I? A poor weak shadow. It is for all Art that I grieve. She could have become a worthy companion even of Victor Hugo himself. Imagine the destiny of Marie joined in matrimony to Émile Deschamps! To what magnificent names might she not have aspired? And yet, what a catastrophe! She, wedded to some minion of finance, having exchanged her respected name for that of Ménessier. Madame Ménessier! What tragedy!

The speech is indefensible, not only because it is a mass of confused thinking, not only because it constitutes obtrusive and unskilful exposition, but because of the inexpertness of its phrasing. The numerous names with which it is studded, "Legitimist," "1830," "Charles X," "Arsenal," "Romanticism," "Victor Hugo," "Émile Deschamps," distract attention from the only necessary statement: that Marie, who in Fontaney's opinion should have married a poet, preferred to marry a banker. The rest is flatulence.<sup>1</sup>

The more pretentious a piece of writing the surer it is to follow a tradition and to inject into modern composition the artificialities of bygone centuries. The ancient masterpiece triumphed in part because its technique was the best known in its day; the modern imitation, unless it is illumi-

<sup>1</sup> While a bombardment of names is an attractively simple method of establishing a period, it is one to be used with care. Names known to an auditor bring up associations; unknown names arouse speculation. In either event they distract attention so greatly that the thoughtful writer will dispose of them before venturing upon important exposition. They may be employed

nated by the genius of a Rostand, is likely only to emphasize the present inadequacy of the past. The Comédie Française, an ancestral home of classicism, is notably broad-minded in its choice of one-act plays; but its influence, in general, and that of its audiences, in particular, are towards tradition, and the author writing for it has but to follow a sacrosanct model to have a success. Molière made use of the devices of the seventeenth century, therefore he may do the same. That unwarranted assumption is a barrier to progress.

It is otherwise in some of the more modest theatres. To the Parisian the Grand Guignol is merely one of the many houses in which the one-act is played. To the foreign student it is a theatre in which all other qualities are subordinated to that of dramatic effectiveness. While that singleness of aim has naturally led to the extreme poles of *bizarrie*, the horror play which paralyses, and the comedy so outspoken that it also paralyses, there has been room between for hundreds of one-acts whose effect is sure, whose writing is direct, and whose technique is superior to that evinced in far more ambitious writings.

Unfortunately it too sets up models, and the French, being imitative, follow them too much. Only a rash critic would venture to guess how many of the Grand Guignol tragedies have ended with the stage direction, "And he (or she) strangles her (or him) slowly while the curtain falls." Only the same critic would attempt to estimate how often the prize for virtue (or another reward of similar character) has been bestowed upon a lady whose morals are totally non-existent. It is good horror when the villain—or the hero—is strangled by the Frankenstein monster he has created—or by the dead body he has brought to life—or by the outraged parent with whose child he has dealt in the same manner. It is good fun when a *cocotte*, the birth of

effectively if time is supplied for the desired association, which, if not inevitable, should be suggested by the dramatist: or they may be presented in such abundance that they 'flatten' each other, thus leaving the mind of the audience receptive to the action which accompanies or follows. Examples of correct use of the device are to be found in *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *L'Aiglon*.

whose infant has been reported at the Bureau of Vital Statistics by five or six putative fathers, receives a crown for virtue. But both the horror and the fun wear thin when a successful model is used by too many writers.

Nevertheless the Grand Guignol, by its willingness to experiment, by its hospitality to unorthodox plays, and by the free hand it gives its successful authors, has done much not only for the one-act in France, but for the one-act everywhere. The secret is no secret at all. A theatre stands still just so long as it considers models of any kind perfect. It progresses when it improves on them so greatly that it creates new ones. In its march towards the future it must be forward-minded: if it turns its eyes imitatively towards any past it stagnates.

This necessarily brief outline should not end without some reference to the effect in France of the lack of a healthy Little Theatre movement. Due largely to the elaborate safeguards thrown around meetings between well-bred young people of both sexes, the movement has never taken root. Buildings devoted wholly to Little Theatre activities do not exist. There are amateur theatricals, cramped partly because the plays which are the vogue in so many French theatres are outspoken, and partly because the Latin amateur is the most puritanical in the world. Granted that there are many inoffensive plays, some of which he uses; but the histrionic speech, so beloved of the professional actor, is beyond his abilities, and he is wholly unequipped to deal with scenic difficulties.

The plays that are within his scope and approved by his taste are so limited in number that an amateur literature is being created for him. It is featured by the comedy, the vaudeville, and the "*comédie gaie*," the last a farce-comedy form which is morally pure and not particularly funny. Capitalizing situations which are ridiculous, but not basically emotive, it is content if it enables a group of young married couples to pass an agreeable evening.

## THE POST-WAR DRAMA

Even in plays published in the present year the characters (each of whom has a good part!) indulge freely in asides. Thus:

PATT [*aside*]. She is delicious! [*Aloud, after having seated himself*] A delightful room! [*Aside*] She must be an artist. [*Aloud*] I've taken a seat. [*Aside*] Well, we're there at last!

Characters soliloquize when alone on the stage. They signalize the end of such scenes by remarking, "Ah! Zut! Here he comes with Simone!"

The plays possess one virtue in common: since stage facilities are lacking they are all playable in a corner of almost any living-room. They reduce the drama to parlour entertainment.

From rubbish of this character to the great one-act plays of the British and American Little Theatres is a far cry. Such plays can have no possible effect on the commercial theatre. Worse, they can never lead to the evolution of a Paul Green, a Harold Brighouse, a Joe Corrie.

When the editor set out to select a single play to represent the French one-act of the present day he was faced by a problem of no small dimensions. The psychological play is well known, and in Gallic hands is prone to be over-rhetorical. The horror play, developed at the Grand Guignol, has made no progress since the heyday, a generation ago, of André de Lorde, its most expert manufacturer. The verse play, abundant in a land whose tongue abounds in rhymes, suffers inevitably in translation. The eternal triangle, the most popular of all French themes, has been hammered at by so many writers that its angles have been blunted.

A comedy, therefore, becomes a logical choice, and *To Kill a Man* possesses qualities of originality so notable that it becomes worthy of the honour. Its beginning is not unusual. Its initial action prepares for, though it does not suggest, the delightful peripeteia which is to come, and

through which the action takes on a new lease of life. The change in the attitude of the audience, once that point has been reached, is most striking: it understands, it foresees what is to come—enough, but not too much—and it follows the development to the climax chuckling at the difficulties Yves is to encounter.

Unlike many French comedies it is not in the least shocking. On the contrary, it is sexless. That should not be at all unwelcome to a public which has been surfeited with plays into which improprieties have been dragged solely because they are improprieties.

Gabriel Timmory, born in Rennes, educated in Lorraine, is one of the best known of French humorists. Author of *Les contes à Madelon*, *Le Manuel Déraisonné des Sports*, *La Colonelle von Schnicke*, his novel, *Les Krickenrinckes d'Amvers*, was crowned by the French Academy.

His plays include *La Course aux Dollars*, given three hundred and thirty-two consecutive performances at the Châtelet, *Un beau mariage*, *La Guerre en Pantoufles*, *L'Honnête Michelin*, and a dozen other works in one, two, three, and four acts. Special mention should be made of the famous *Cultivateur de Chicago*, a two-act comedy based on Mark Twain. Originally produced at the Grand Guignol twenty-nine years ago, it becomes better known every year, and celebrated its twenty-first birthday by appearing in a new and more pretentious edition.

*To Kill a Man* is adapted from *Un Désespéré*, which was first broadcast by Radio-Paris in 1935.

*France*

TO KILL A MAN

A COMEDY

By GABRIEL TIMMORY

*Adapted by* PERCIVAL WILDE

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## CHARACTERS

FRANCIS ARNAUD  
DANIEL GIVRETTE  
YVES DE TOLBIAC

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## TO KILL A MAN

*At Evian, a room in the Hôtel du Lion d'Or. At the left a window; above it a door opening on the hallway. The bathroom door is at the right. A bed is in a corner. A flat-topped desk, with a telephone on it, is near the centre.*

*As the curtain rises Francis Arnaud, a rather stiff, monocled gentleman in the middle thirties, is engaged in writing. At his elbow is a telegram. An open valise is on a low luggage stand; near by are articles which will be packed in it. Arnaud's hat and coat are on the bed.*

ARNAUD [*writing*]. "Lucien: George, further association between us has become impossible. George: I agree entirely. Lucien: What will you take to get out?" [*The telephone bell rings; he takes off the receiver.*] Yes? . . . Who? . . . Who did you say? . . . Girouette? Pirouette? . . . Oh, Givrette! Yes, indeed! Ask him to come up! [*He hangs up.*] How much would George ask? A million! I don't have to pay it. [*Writing*] "George: A million. Lucien: You're crazy." [*A knock at the door.*] Come in!

GIVRETTE [*enters. He is a man in the forties, a jovial soul, simply dressed*]. Well, well, how are you, my dear Arnaud? Did I have to go all the way to Evian to catch you?

ARNAUD. There's no time for anything in Paris. . . . But, my dear Givrette, how did you know I was here?

GIVRETTE. Through a mishap for which I'm grateful, since it's brought us together.

ARNAUD. Then I'm grateful too.

GIVRETTE. I spent the beginning of my holiday at Cabourg. I left yesterday morning. I was invited to come here—by the Langerots. Do you know them?



ARNAUD. I don't know a living soul in Evian. That's why I'm here.

GIVRETTE. They have a villa. Charming people! He's in the textile business. She's delightful—but rattle-headed! When I got here I found the room which was supposed to be mine full of assorted cousins: Madame Langerot had completely forgotten me. Excuses! Just one guest-room! I soothed her. I told her I'd go to the hotel. But when I inquired here I found it was chock-full. "Nothing left," the clerk said. But the proprietor happened to be there. "There's a gentleman leaving in an hour: Monsieur Arnaud." I asked, "Is it Francis Arnaud, the playwright?" He said, "Yes." I said, "I'll take his room; but if he's still here send my name up"—and here I am! It was as easy as that!

ARNAUD. I'm glad to see you.

GIVRETTE. And now, you don't mean to say you're going back to Paris in the middle of August?

ARNAUD. I've got to. My new play is going into rehearsal, and I don't want Dumoutier to make a mess of it. [*Showing him the telegram*] Look at the wire he sent: "Negotiating with Fernand Brizard for part of Lucien." It's insane! Do you know Brizard? He's the Adonis-like leading man whom the tailors dress up in wasp-waisted overcoats and photograph for their advertisements!

GIVRETTE. He's effeminate.

ARNAUD. Exactly. He'd ruin the part. Lucien is a modern young business man: I want an actor who has personality and some pathos. Dumoutier could never pick him out for me. The moment I got his telegram I wired back that I was returning. If he insists on giving the part to Brizard I'll take the play away from him. The business of writing plays is nothing but an incessant battle! You're lucky enough to be a humorist. You don't know anything about it.

GIVRETTE. I'm flattered.

ARNAUD. Your newspaper column is very clever.

TO KILL A MAN

GIVRETTE. Oh, I've got the hang of it. I've been turning out a daily column for fifteen years. With that, and one light novel a year, I'm comfortable, though I'll never be rich.

ARNAUD. You're happy, too.

GIVRETTE. Couldn't be happier. . . . What rotten luck that you're leaving just as I'm arriving!

ARNAUD. I can't help it. I'm sorry.

GIVRETTE. Were you working?

ARNAUD. I was rewriting the end of the second act.

GIVRETTE. And I bothered you!

ARNAUD. Oh, when a play goes into rehearsal the author surrenders all privacy. I've already been interviewed three times.

GIVRETTE. All the more reason why I should clear out. I'll go to Langerot's and get my luggage together. Will you be here when I come back?

ARNAUD. I don't think so. My car will be ready in ten minutes.

GIVRETTE. It's not a bad room, is it? Is there a bath?

ARNAUD [*showing the door*]. Yes, just here.

GIVRETTE. Good. I'm going. See you again in Paris, old fellow. [*He goes.*]

ARNAUD [*returning to his writing*]. Well, where was I? "George: A million. Lucien: You're crazy." That won't do at all. A man with Lucien's character would never bargain. The scene would be more forcible if I gave him another line. Now: "Lucien: You want a million? I'll give you two." It's not a bit more expensive for me! "George (taken aback): Two millions? It's too much!" Now, one sentence for Lucien with a real punch in it. . . . Ah! [*Energetically, after a moment's thought*] "Lucien: It is impossible to pay too much for becoming the master!" There, it's done! "Curtain." Oof! [*As he gathers the sheets the telephone rings.*] Hello? . . . Yves de Tolbiac? Don't know him. . . . Oh, a reporter? . . . Well, send him up. [*He hangs up the telephone, muttering*

"The fourth one," and he spruces himself at a mirror. There is a knock.] Come in.

TOLBIAC [*a pale young man, who appears to be half starved, dressed in worn but clean clothing. He carries a brief-case*]. Excuse me, Monsieur Arnaud. I hate to bother you . . .

ARNAUD [*indicating a chair*]. It's quite all right. . . . Er . . . which paper do you represent?

TOLBIAC. Monsieur Arnaud, I may as well tell you the truth: I don't represent any paper. I sent up my name because I learned, by chance, that you were in Evian, and I knew how good-hearted you were. [*In a sharp, jerky voice*] The circumstances to which I have been reduced are such that I don't stop at resorting to a subterfuge, which happens to be an innocent one, and I don't split hairs about little questions of propriety. As a matter of fact, my story is so sad——

ARNAUD [*interrupting, and half rising*]. I'm sorry I can't ask you to stay, but my time is limited. I'm just leaving, and——

TOLBIAC [*fiercely*]. You must hear me!

ARNAUD. But——

TOLBIAC. You must!

ARNAUD. I can only repeat that I'm just——

TOLBIAC. First of all, sit down!

ARNAUD. But, look here——

TOLBIAC [*tragically*]. Sit down! . . . Please sit down.

ARNAUD [*obeying; frightened*]. Well?

TOLBIAC. This is my story. [*He sits, and places his brief-case on the desk.*] I am a member of an old family of Champagne, whose fortune was greatly impaired by the revolutions. From my earliest childhood——

ARNAUD. Monsieur——

TOLBIAC. Let me talk. [*He continues.*] I was supposed to go into the army. I hated it. [*Wildly*] I am a pacifist. I longed for fame, and I wanted to make a name for myself in literature. I was positive that an Yves de Tolbiac could duplicate the success of a de Vigny or a de Musset. Positive!

TO KILL A MAN

They were dreams! Delusions! . . . My father is a martinet. He has the contempt of the old nobility for the artistic professions, and he lets nobody contradict him. When I refused to give in to his wishes and go to the military school at Saint-Cyr he disowned me, and swore that he would never look at me again. I know him. He'll keep his oath. . . . So I went to Paris. . . .

ARNAUD [*showing his watch, and half rising*]. I'm sorry, but the time——

TOLBIAC [*motioning him to sit down with a menacing gesture*]. You must hear me! [*Arnaud sits.*] In Paris I struggled for two years, trying to get a job. It was useless. . . . I wrote poetry which the magazines wouldn't print, plays which were rejected by all the managers. . . . I got a few squibs published in the newspapers at starvation prices. [*With energy, striking his chest*] And all the time, Monsieur, I knew I had talent! I *have* talent! But how can I prove it when a gang of editors and profiteers organizes a conspiracy of silence against me? Would you like me to read you one of my plays?

ARNAUD. Time is——

TOLBIAC. I won't insist. You would feel obliged to say nice things about it, and that wouldn't do me any good at all. [*He sighs, and resumes his story.*] Little by little my modest savings disappeared. After the most terrific efforts I had to admit that I was beaten. Then I remembered that a cousin of mine, a retired cavalry officer, lived at Evian, and I knew that if he would put me up for a few weeks I'd have the time to write a novel which some publisher would accept, or a play which would actually see the footlights. . . . I travelled from Paris to Laroche third-class: I didn't have the money to buy a ticket all the way through. I walked from Laroche to Evian, living I don't know how. A few minutes ago I knocked at my cousin's door. He slammed it in my face. He told me to go back to my Bohemian friends—those were his words. And there you are! . . . Since yesterday I've had only half a bun to eat. Where shall I go?

What is to become of me? [*Seeing that Arnaud has taken a coin out of his pocket*] What on earth are you doing, monsieur?

ARNAUD [*offering him the coin*]. Since you're so hard up——

TOLBIAC [*with a bitter laugh*]. Oh, I understand! You dare to offer me twenty francs!

ARNAUD. But——

TOLBIAC. Twenty francs, to me! To me! Yves de Tolbiac! As if I were a beggar!

ARNAUD. I didn't mean to offend you.

TOLBIAC. Oh, indeed? And that is how you receive a gentleman, a brother-author who tells you his misfortunes! You would throw him alms? [*Violently*] No, no! An end to humiliations! I've had enough of insults!

[*He produces a revolver from the brief-case.*]

ARNAUD [*frightened*]. What are you going to do?

[*Instinctively he reaches for the telephone.*]

TOLBIAC. Don't move!

ARNAUD [*paralysed*]. But, my dear Monsieur——

TOLBIAC. I warn you, if you make a move towards the telephone, towards the bell, if you call for help, I shall fire! Is that understood?

ARNAUD. Will you tell me why?

TOLBIAC. In a minute. [*He dashes to the door, his revolver covering Arnaud, and locks it.*] Now we shall be undisturbed! [*More gently*] Please don't worry, Monsieur Arnaud. *You* are not in the slightest danger. I am neither a robber nor a murderer. There's going to be only one victim—myself.

ARNAUD [*frightened*]. You're going to kill yourself?

TOLBIAC. Immediately.

ARNAUD [*reaching for the telephone*]. I won't permit——

TOLBIAC [*aiming the revolver*]. Don't move! [*Arnaud is motionless.*] Remember what I told you! In my circumstances I shall stop at nothing! One move and I shoot!

ARNAUD. Did you call on me with the intention of killing yourself in my presence?

TOLBIAC. Exactly.

TO KILL A MAN

ARNAUD. You're crazy!

TOLBIAC. Not at all. I sought one thing in Paris: fame! For that I broke with my family. For that I worked day and night. For that I endured the most outrageous humiliations. But, despite my efforts, fame did not come. Well, here's my chance! By blowing out my brains in the presence of a celebrated man, a master playwright who may, perhaps, get an idea for a scene out of this, I shall connect my little name with his great one! I shall force the stupid crowd which wouldn't look at me to take me seriously! The newspapers will print every scrap of information they can gather about me!

ARNAUD. At what a price!

TOLBIAC. Fame is worth what it costs: I shall emerge from obscurity.

ARNAUD. To enter into nothingness.

TOLBIAC. The few moments before I die will be ample consolation. From this instant on I know that my death will not have been useless. To-night people will talk about me. To-morrow my poor manuscripts will be read. The day after to-morrow they will be published. I know I have talent; the critics may pronounce me a genius. At this moment I feel that I am already famous.

ARNAUD. You have only the hope of becoming famous.

TOLBIAC. During the few seconds that are left I may consider that hope realized. I shall die beautifully. [*Raising the revolver to his temple*] Don't let this upset you.

ARNAUD [*energetically*]. Wait!

TOLBIAC. Why?

ARNAUD. You have no right to kill yourself!

TOLBIAC. Why not?

ARNAUD. Think of those you leave behind!

TOLBIAC. Who? My father—who disowned me? My cousin—who slammed his door in my face? I have no wife, no child. I may do what I please with my life.

ARNAUD. Not at your age.

TOLBIAC. Suffering has made me old.

ARNAUD. Words, words! You are young! You are healthy! You are not suffering from any disease——

TOLBIAC [*gloomily*]. I am miserable.

ARNAUD. That can be cured.

TOLBIAC. No.

ARNAUD. If you have the will-power, yes!

TOLBIAC. I had more than enough. It didn't help.

ARNAUD. All the more reason for not giving up the struggle.

TOLBIAC. Will I find the editors any less selfish? When will they stop conspiring against new writers?

ARNAUD. The future is before you.

TOLBIAC [*laughing*]. The future? I don't know where I'll sleep to-night.

ARNAUD. You won't accept help?

TOLBIAC [*proudly*]. I am not a beggar. No! My mind is made up. [*He shows the revolver.*] Here, ready, is the instrument of my deliverance. [*He places the revolver in the palm of his hand, and looks at it.*] Amusing, isn't it? A little thing, which looks so harmless. . . . A toy. . . . You can put it in your pocket. There's room for it in the palm of your hand. It doesn't take up any space at all. . . . But it's there when you want it! You press the trigger! Crack! And there's one man less in the world! He had a heart, ideas, feelings; he spoke, he moved, he lived! Now he is nothing but a mass of inert flesh. . . . Wonderful, isn't it?

ARNAUD. If you think so.

TOLBIAC. It's beautifully made. Look at it.

[*He shows it to Arnaud.*]

ARNAUD [*half rising, and holding out his hand for it*]. Allow me?

TOLBIAC [*aiming it at him quickly*]. Gently, if you please! [*Arnaud sits again.*] Suppose we keep our distances. [*Again placing the revolver in the palm of his hand*] There are plainer ones, worse-made ones, which jam at the last moment, or make a distressingly loud noise when they go off. This is a precision tool, an improved Sanderson, if you please, the

best American make, the finest killing instrument known! The cylinder holds seven shots; the mechanism is adjusted to a nicety; the trigger responds to the gentlest pressure! And it is discreet! The crack of a whip: that's all! The sound that might be made if a puny girl slapped your face! Notice in what excellent taste it is finished: the barrel is hexagonal; the grip is finely checked. . . . How does a poor devil like me come to own such an expensive trinket? Perhaps you'd like to know: I'll tell you. Once, by accident, I had five hundred francs—a fortune! I spent them all on this bit of insanity. But I haven't regretted it! Oh, no! In the normal course of events it would have been bought by a man like you, a man with a fat pocket-book which needs protection at nights. It would have been useful to you often, and it can help me just once. . . . But what's the object of more talk? Fate knows where it is leading me. Now! [*He cocks the revolver.*] No hard feelings.

[*He raises it to his temple.*]

ARNAUD [*quickly*]. Wait!

TOLBIAC. What is it?

ARNAUD. You've just given me an idea! I'll make you a proposition! Don't be offended: I understand your scruples: you won't accept charity. Well, I like your pride. But, thanks to you, I've just realized how reckless I've been. One of these nights, as a matter of fact, I may need a revolver. I haven't any. Will you let me have yours, since you say it's a good one? I'll buy it from you for what you paid for it. I won't suggest your making a profit on it, because I don't want you to feel that I'm offering you alms indirectly. You are not begging. You are selling your own property. Your pride won't be hurt.

TOLBIAC [*hesitantly*]. I admit the money would help just now—

ARNAUD. Wouldn't it?

TOLBIAC. But in a few days—

ARNAUD. That's all you need: a few days! I have a pet theory which I've seen illustrated a number of times: sooner



or later a man comes to the end of a streak of good or bad luck. You've heard of the punter at Monte Carlo, who pushed his good luck too far, and was wiped out?

TOLBIAC. Yes; I have.

ARNAUD. That's *one* illustration. . . . One of my friends was incredibly daring. During the War he exposed himself everywhere, as if it were fun. He ran the most terrible risks, and escaped untouched. Well, he was shot dead five minutes before the Armistice. That's another illustration. . . . Haven't we all heard of the financiers who didn't worry about the size of their undertakings because everything they touched had always succeeded—and who ended bankrupt? The opposite is equally true: I was about to go under when they produced my first play. It floated me again. Did you ever hear the story of Brocantin, the popular novelist?

TOLBIAC. No.

ARNAUD. He was tired of starving in Paris, and was about to leave France altogether when he met a college chum who offered him the job of editing a tiny rural newspaper. It paid only a bare living, but he took it. He published a story of his own in it. It attracted attention. You know the rest. . . . You too have met the greatest difficulties; you've come to the end of your hard luck. It's going to change!

TOLBIAC. Do you think so?

ARNAUD. It's mathematically demonstrable. And you would do the extraordinarily stupid thing of ending your existence at the precise moment that Fate is about to shower you with favours! I am positive, I tell you, positive that this afternoon—to-night, perhaps; perhaps the moment you go out into the street—Fate will execute a right-about face! At the very least try it and see!

TOLBIAC [*after a pause*]. What weaklings we are! I came here with my mind made up. I thought I should never change it. But you have given me a ray of hope, and my resolution is weakening——

ARNAUD. Don't be ashamed of it. Buck up!

TO KILL A MAN

TOLBIAC. But supposing I should be an exception to your theory? I wouldn't have my revolver any more.

ARNAUD. If you must you can buy another. It doesn't have to be such an expensive one. Come [*he offers him a five-hundred-franc banknote*], don't refuse this—what shall we call it?—this lottery ticket.

TOLBIAC [*takes the note; gives his revolver to Arnaud; rises*]. Ought I—ought I thank you?

ARNAUD [*who has pocketed the revolver briskly*]. Certainly not.

TOLBIAC [*taking up his brief-case*]. I didn't know I was such a coward. [*Moving towards the door*] I despise myself! [*He opens the door.*] Oh, I despise myself! [*He goes.*

ARNAUD [*alone, wiping his brow*]. Whew, what a scene! I didn't expect anything like that! [*He finishes gathering his papers.*] Is he really gone? [*He crosses to the window and looks out.*] Ah! There he goes, crossing the street! And if I had not evolved that theory about luck, in a moment of God-given inspiration, he'd be lying there on the floor with his brains blown out! [*He shudders.*] Brhr! From now on, young chap, I won't be at home if you call! [*He turns from the window.*] My head aches. [*He searches in the valise.*] Where did I pack the aspirin? [*He finds it.*] Here. Now a little water. [*He goes off into the bathroom.*

GIVRETTE [*enters, with a small bag*]. What? I thought you had left.

ARNAUD [*from the bathroom*]. I was detained.

GIVRETTE. I'm here with my luggage. The rest of it's downstairs. [*He puts down the bag. He notices the bottle on the desk.*] Are you taking aspirin?

ARNAUD [*returning into the room*]. You see.

[*He swallows the pill, and drinks a little water.*

GIVRETTE. A headache?

ARNAUD. I have a right to have one. [*He puts down the glass.*] My dear fellow, I've just escaped from what would have been the most horrible catastrophe of my entire life!

GABRIEL TIMMORY

GIVRETTE. When did this happen? "

ARNAUD. Just now, while you were at Angereau's.

GIVRETTE. Langerot's.

ARNAUD. Excuse me. I hardly know what I'm saying.

GIVRETTE. You *do* look pale! [*Going to him*] You're shivering! Your hands are clammy! There's cold sweat on your forehead! What on earth is the matter with you? What happened?

ARNAUD. A tragedy.

GIVRETTE. Are you joking?

ARNAUD. I was visited by a poor devil who told me he was sick of getting nowhere with his writing, and who threatened to blow out his brains in my presence. I offered to help him. He wouldn't take money. I tried to talk him out of it—no good—and he was about to shoot himself when all of a sudden I had the happy thought of offering to—

GIVRETTE [*interrupting*]. To buy his revolver.

ARNAUD. How do you know that?

GIVRETTE. When Brocantin was here he bought one also. I met him at Cabourg, and he told me about it. There was a young man who was too proud to accept charity, and he prevented him from committing suicide. The young man's name was—it was——

ARNAUD. Yves de Tolbiac?

GIVRETTE. That's it!

ARNAUD [*drawing a breath of relief*]. I am myself again!

GIVRETTE. And you've got the revolver.

ARNAUD [*giving it to him*]. Here it is.

GIVRETTE [*looking at it*]. What did you pay for it?

ARNAUD. Five hundred francs.

GIVRETTE. H'm! Worth about a hundred. But the expense of putting on a play is always high. Eh? [*Returning the revolver to him*] Your souvenir!

ARNAUD. I shall complain to the police.

GIVRETTE. What about? He wouldn't accept your alms. He didn't want to sell the revolver—you induced him

TO KILL A MAN

to do that! And the Penal Code provides no punishment for a man who decides to commit suicide and changes his mind!

ARNAUD. We'll see about it, anyhow!

GIVRETTE. Why do you take it in such bad part?

ARNAUD. If you had been in my place—

GIVRETTE. I would have thought it funny.

ARNAUD. Oh, indeed?

GIVRETTE. You're wrong to get upset, and you're not fair. You've spent money to get rid of crooks who have humbugged you in the past, and you've been well satisfied. Now you're nursing a grudge against a man who, to give him proper credit, took the trouble to think up something brand-new! There was nothing old-fashioned about the show he put on for you—you'll admit that—and originality isn't to be found at every street-corner. I have the greatest respect for Monsieur de Tolbiac.

ARNAUD. Because he didn't cheat you.

GIVRETTE. I admire him because I am a connoisseur.

ARNAUD. As for me, if I ever catch him . . . !

[*He packs his bag.*]

GIVRETTE. Revengeful soul! . . . Going?

ARNAUD. My chauffeur is waiting. I'm late already.  
See you again.

[*The telephone rings.*]

GIVRETTE. Shall I take it? [*He does so.*] Hello? . . . Monsieur Givrette speaking. Who is calling? . . . Monsieur de Tolbiac?

ARNAUD [*dropping his valise*]. Damn his impudence!

GIVRETTE [*covering the transmitter with his hand, and chuckling*]. It's perfectly natural. He thinks you've left. My name must be on his list. He knows the Langerots invited me to Evian. [*Working it out, and nodding vigorously*] He went to their villa. They sent him here. He's calling. What an energetic young fellow! He's delightful! [*Seeing that Arnaud has started to leave*] Where are you going?

ARNAUD. To have him arrested.

GIVRETTE. An artist of his calibre? It would be terrible!

He deserves better than that. [*He speaks into the telephone.*]  
Ask Monsieur de Tolbiac to come up.

ARNAUD. What are you going to do?

GIVRETTE. Collect your belongings, go into the bathroom, leave the door ajar, and listen.

ARNAUD. But my chauffeur——

GIVRETTE. You're late already. What does it matter if you're a little later? Go! Quick! I hear the lift! . . . [*He gathers up Arnaud's things, and puts them and Arnaud in the bathroom. There is a knock on the door. Givrette hastens to the desk, and sits as if writing.*] Come in. [*To Tolbiac, who enters*] What do you wish, monsieur?

TOLBIAC. I sent up my name because I learned, by chance, that you were in Evian, and I knew how good-hearted you were. [*In a sharp, jerky voice*] The circumstances to which I have been reduced are such that I don't split hairs about little questions of propriety. As a matter of fact, my story is so sad——

GIVRETTE. Do sit down.

TOLBIAC [*sitting*]. Thank you. . . . This is my story. [*He places his brief-case on the desk.*] I am a member of an old family of Champagne, whose fortune was greatly impaired by the revolutions. From my earliest childhood——

[*He stops, expecting to be interrupted.*]

GIVRETTE. I am all attention.

TOLBIAC. From my earliest childhood I was supposed to go into the army. I hated it. [*Wildly*] I am a pacifist.

GIVRETTE. So am I.

TOLBIAC. I longed for fame, and I wanted to make a name for myself in literature. I was positive that an Yves de Tolbiac could duplicate the success of a de Vigny or a de Musset. Positive! They were dreams! Delusions! . . . My father is a martinet. He has the contempt of the old nobility for the artistic professions, and he lets nobody contradict him.

GIVRETTE. I am greatly interested.

TOLBIAC. When I refused to give in to his wishes and go

to the military school at Saint-Cyr he disowned me, and swore that he would never look at me again. I know him. He'll keep his oath. . . . So I went to Paris.

GIVRETTE. What then?

TOLBIAC. I struggled for two years, trying to get a job.

GIVRETTE. Don't go on: I know what's coming. You're hard up.

TOLBIAC. Since yesterday I've had only half a bun to eat. [*Seeing that Givrette has drawn a note from his wallet*] What on earth are you doing, monsieur?

GIVRETTE. If you are dying of hunger. . . .

TOLBIAC [*with a bitter laugh*]. Oh, I understand! You dare to offer me a hundred francs!

GIVRETTE. No; fifty——

TOLBIAC. Fifty francs to me, Yves de Tolbiac! As if I were a beggar! And that is how you receive a gentleman, a brother-author who tells you his misfortune! You would throw him alms? [*Violently*] No, no! An end to humiliations! I've had enough of insults!

[*He produces a revolver from his brief-case.*]

GIVRETTE. What are you going to do?

TOLBIAC. I am going to kill myself, monsieur, here in your presence!

GIVRETTE [*with the appearance of emotion*]. Have you made up your mind to do that?

TOLBIAC. Absolutely!

GIVRETTE [*most seriously*]. Well, then, you're probably right. Kill yourself, my friend; kill yourself, kill yourself!

TOLBIAC [*disconcerted*]. You approve of my doing that?

GIVRETTE. I do—and I admire you! I have found a real man at last! You have dignity! You don't accept alms! Bravo! If you had allowed me to give you fifty francs, a hundred francs, five hundred francs, even a thousand francs, would they have saved you? Certainly not. There's nothing to be done about literature. Even if the public thinks you've arrived you never arrive! Take me, for example. You treat me with respect. You imagine that, like a few others,

I'm successful! How ridiculous! You think I'm the happiest of men! What irony! [*Dramatically*] The truth, my dear fellow, is that I lead the life of a convict. Imaginé the torture I undergo when I write my daily column for the newspaper! No rest. Always worried. Every morning I ask myself if I'm not empty, finished, written out. Years go by, and I'm in a trance. I must turn out a new light novel every season. It brings me new worries: will it sell? Yes? Then I worry about the novel for the season after that. In the meantime the other writers are jealous, and are cursing me. The book-reviewers roast me, and wish they could think up a way to dispose of me once and for all. Oh, to get rid of Givrette, the famous Givrette! To take a fall out of him! What joy! What glory! . . . There's the life that's awaiting you if you're unlucky enough to stick to the damnable profession of letters! It's hell! So far as I'm concerned I've had enough of it, and I'm happy because, thanks to you, I shall be able to get away from it.

TOLBIAC [*astonished*]. Thanks to *me*?

GIVRETTE [*nodding violently*]. For many weeks I also have dreamed of killing myself. But I didn't have the courage. Now I shall hesitate no longer. You will show me that in the great sum total of existence death is an episode without a to-morrow! . . . Thank you. Kill yourself first; I'll kill myself next. [*Tolbiac, aghast, recoils a step.*] Don't do that! Stay where you are! Then you'll fall on the rug!

TOLBIAC. But——

GIVRETTE. Would you rather take my chair? Would you like to shoot yourself sitting? It would be more comfortable. Are you going to aim at your head?

TOLBIAC. Well, really——

GIVRETTE. Don't you think there'll be less chance of your missing if you aim at your heart?

TOLBIAC. That is to say——

GIVRETTE. My dear fellow, don't let me influence you one way or the other! If you prefer to wait for the inspiration of the final moment that's your privilege! Whatever

it may be, when I see you there, gasping, with your brains oozing over the floor, or your heart bubbling blood—whichever you decide when the time comes—when I see that the pressure of your finger on a bit of iron has been enough to free you for ever from all your miseries, I cannot tell you with what joy I, in my turn, shall imitate your act of emancipation! [*Tragically*] Oh, my friend, what a revenge we shall take on the stupid men who slighted you and persecuted me when our bleeding bodies are found here, side by side, with our faces set for ever in smiles of disgust, as if we held them in disdain! We shall be liberated, free! I can't wait for the happy moment! Quick! Quick! Shoot!

TOLBIAC [*much embarrassed*]. I—I no longer have the right.

GIVRETTE. And why not, I ask you?

TOLBIAC. I might kill myself; but I cannot drag you too down to death. That would be murder.

GIVRETTE [*sighing*]. Well, then, give me your revolver. I'll shoot you first—

TOLBIAC. Excuse me.

GIVRETTE. Quitting?

TOLBIAC. No.

GIVRETTE. Really?

TOLBIAC. I do not feel that I would be less responsible for your death if I set you the example of committing suicide.

GIVRETTE. You're splitting hairs, and you said you never did that about little questions.

TOLBIAC. My scruples are correct.

GIVRETTE. All right. [*He sighs.*] Kill yourself. I—I will make the sacrifice of continuing to live.

TOLBIAC. Is that a promise?

GIVRETTE. I swear it! Oh, how lucky you are to be able to kill yourself! I envy you! . . . Good-bye, my friend. [*He sits, and sees that Tolbiac does not know what to do next.*] What? Are you still alive?



TOLBIAC [*looking at his revolver*]. It's because——

GIVRETTE. You're wasting time! Shoot!

TOLBIAC [*a happy thought*]. My revolver doesn't seem to work.

GIVRETTE. How very annoying!

TOLBIAC. What am I to do?

GIVRETTE. Don't let it upset you. [*Drawing a revolver from his pocket*] Use mine.

ARNAUD [*opening the bathroom door and thrusting out an arm which holds the weapon recently purchased*]. Or mine!

[*He shows his head.*]

TOLBIAC [*seeing him*]. Monsieur Arnaud!

GIVRETTE. There are plenty of revolvers, you see. [*Offering his ironically*] Let's get on with it!

ARNAUD [*entering, and offering his*]. Let's get on!

TOLBIAC [*swallowing painfully*]. Oh, I see! The game's up. What will my boss say to me now?

GIVRETTE. Your boss?

TOLBIAC. The sporting-goods dealer for whom I work.

ARNAUD. I understand! He sends you to people! You threaten to kill yourself, and you sell revolvers!

TOLBIAC. Quite so, Monsieur Arnaud.

ARNAUD. Your sporting-goods dealer is clever.

TOLBIAC. The idea wasn't his: it's mine.

ARNAUD. Yours? My congratulations.

GIVRETTE [*roaring with laughter*]. What a revolver salesman!

TOLBIAC. Excuse me: an actor.

GIVRETTE. An actor? You? On the stage?

TOLBIAC. A comedian out of a job. That's why I thought out the suicide idea. I've got to live. I act my little play for the account of the sporting-goods dealer, and I've been selling two or three revolvers a day—and incidentally holding down a good job.

ARNAUD. You'll have to hunt another one.

GIVRETTE. Why don't you go back to the theatre?

TOLBIAC. Which?

TO KILL A MAN

GIVRETTE. Any\* one of them. Monsieur Arnaud will give you an introduction.

ARNAUD. Never!

GIVRETTE. What, you don't see how luck has brought you the very actor you need? Personality! Pathos! He fooled you with his own comedy; he'll act yours just as convincingly!

ARNAUD [*after hesitating*]. I'll—I'll let him read the lines. I won't promise anything.

TOLBIAC [*delighted*]. Oh, Monsieur Arnaud, how grateful I shall be! I'll do my very best to please you, believe that! And if I don't succeed——

GIVRETTE. You'll blow your brains out?

TOLBIAC [*sincerely*]. Yes, monsieur.

GIVRETTE [*laughing*]. He's incurable!

ARNAUD [*laughing*]. I'm afraid so. He'll spend the rest of his life killing himself!

CURTAIN



## Russia

### N. N. EVRÉINOV: "THE CORRIDORS OF THE SOUL"

DESPITE the patriotic claims of Professor B. V. Kazansky, who has devoted an entire book to him, it is difficult to find anything characteristically Russian in the thinking, the method, or the writing of Nicholas Nicholaievitch Evréinov. It is true that his scenes, when placed in any identifiable country, are laid in Russia, that his characters frequently bear Russian names, and that the influence of such earlier Russian dramatists as Gogol is discernible in those of his plays into which a comedy element enters. But his outlook on life and on the drama, which he considers synonymous, is universal rather than national, and from a philosophical point of view might not inappropriately be termed a 'theatralized'—Evréinov's own coined word—subjectivism. That he became a leader in Russia was due to the accident that he lived and worked, both before and after the Revolution, in Petrograd. Had he lived elsewhere he would have become a leader quite as naturally.

In *Introduction to Monodrama*, *The Way of the Actor*, and *Lectures on Staging* he has written copiously on dramatic and scenic theory. His thought, however, is admirably summed up in his preface to *The Chief Thing*, "a comedy for some, a drama for others," produced in 1926 at the Theatre Guild, New York City, and, as *La Comédie du bonheur*, at the Théâtre Montmartre, Paris:

Eliminate those moments when you are not 'posing,' or 'acting,' or watching others 'posing' or playing rôles themselves. Eliminate those moments when you see this or that in your dreams, the author and director of which is your sub-

conscious ego. Eliminate all the theatrical, ceremonial side of your life, the games of your past and present childhood, your buffoonery, your imitation of your acquaintances. Eliminate your reading of plays and novels, which represent nothing else than artificially re-enacted life. Eliminate all your hours of hypocrisy, the hours devoted to social duties and conventionalities, the stream of hours displaying your 'good breeding' . . . and you will see that there is so little in our lives that is not theatre, in the broad sense, that most of us would exclaim, "Every minute of our lives is theatre." . . . We 'play' constantly; we invent a new world by transforming ourselves. . . . In life illusion is just as essential as on the stage.<sup>1</sup>

If Evréinov's reasoning is valid, and it hardly seems possible to question it, then the most important of all stages lies in the soul of the individual. Whatever the action which takes place there, it is conditioned by that soul. The sum of it is a moment in which we see another play a *rôle*, and the conclusion is one we may accept either as comedy or tragedy. In either event there is the vicarious satisfaction, the Greek *κάθαρσις*, which is the essence of an audience's reaction.

The orthodox drama is action at one remove. The Strindbergian drama is action at two removes. The 'monodrama' of Evréinov is action at two removes *staged in the soul itself*. "His protagonists," writes Herr Csokor, himself an eminent dramatist, "are the scenes of his action. It is through the nerves and mentalities of his characters that we live in worlds brought to them by their imaginations, and in which they are harried by a multitude of grotesque spirits. The most resolute of his 'monodramas,' as he himself states, which out of all of his writings takes second place only to his *Phantasmagoria of Love*, is *The Corridors of the Soul*."

The flowering of Evréinov's genius was singularly precocious. In 1895, at the age of sixteen, he was a law student in St Petersburg, and in that year his first play, *The Rehearsal*,

<sup>1</sup> Condensed and paraphrased from the translation by Herman Bernstein.

## EVREINOV: "THE CORRIDORS OF THE SOUL"

was produced by a dramatic school. In 1907 he became the director of the Ancient Theatre, a stage dedicated to the production of Greek and Spanish classics—and had had two more plays of his own acted by that time. The next year he succeeded Meierhold as director for the great actress Komissarshevskaja, began publishing his writings on theory, and in 1910 founded and directed the *Krivoj-Serkel*, the 'Parody Theatre,' considered by many the foremost *théâtre intime* in the world. It was at that theatre that he produced Shaw's *Candida*, with a black boy reading the stage directions aloud, and the first act of Gogol's *Inspector General*, staged in four different manners in a single evening. The War interrupted his career, both as a director and as a writer, but by 1919 he had finished *The Chief Thing*, and he escaped from his exile in South Russia a few years later to continue with *The Ship of the Just* and a comedy strangely entitled *Electro-kiss*.

A play by Evreinov, adapted into English as *The Theatre of the Soul* by Marie Potapenko and Christopher St John, was produced by Edith Craig at the Little Theatre in London in March 1915. Christopher St John writes that William Archer found it "extremely original and striking," E. F. Spence "a weird, clever piece," and a third critic "poor and puerile and pretentious." In October of the same year the play was rehearsed for public production at the Alhambra Theatre on "Russia's Day." After some delay it was licensed by the Lord Chamberlain, whereupon André Charlot, the manager of the theatre, "sent an abrupt message to Miss Craig to inform her that the play was not to be done." Lady Randolph Churchill thereupon organized a *matinée* at the Shaftesbury Theatre in December 1915, and another *matinée* was given at the Savoy Theatre in 1916.

It is hard to understand why *The Theatre of the Soul* encountered such opposition in England. The language of the play is outspoken, but hardly enough so to offend a mature audience. The singer declares that she has "beautiful legs and firm breasts," the wife calls her "a creature for

sale" and a "harlot," but that does not explain why reactionaries banded together against Evréinov. Even the fact that the play ends with a suicide gives no clue to Charlot's attitude.

But the adventures of the play had only begun.

Franz Theodor Csokor, a Viennese dramatist of Czech descent, spent two months in the Russian capital, and met Evréinov, at whose home young artists and literary men were wont to gather. The same group met also at the house of Kugel, publisher of the theatrical paper *Theatr i Iskusstvo*, on the Wosnesensy Prospekt, and the two dramatists became friends.

Csokor knew little Russian and Evréinov knew little German; but the two, assisted by a mutual friend, E. Mocrousov, who was fluent in both tongues, went over the play word by word and sentence by sentence in the light of the experience that Evréinov had gained in staging it in Russia. Had Csokor wished only to make a German version of the original Mocrousov's help would have sufficed, and the author's assistance would not have been needed; but Evréinov wished to create a new text. The result was *Die Kulissen der Seele: The Corridors of the Soul*. (Literally *Kulissen* are 'wings'—of a stage).

The serious student of dramatic technique should not fail to compare the Potapenko-St John translation,<sup>1</sup> based on the author's first manuscript, with the Csokor-Mocrousov-Evréinov version, as literally presented here. The variations are numerous, and in every instance the revision shows an improvement.

The English text describes the diagram drawn by the Professor in three brief sentences, and leaps at once to the statement that "science does not confine itself to explaining things. It also offers us consolation." The German goes into greater detail, partly because it is interesting, but chiefly because a cover-scene is needed to give the Professor time to draw his diagram. And it adds a reference to "the stage

<sup>1</sup> Published by Williams and Norgate.

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setting in which we place the tri-partite soul of . . . a certain Mr Ivanov," indispensable preparation for the new conclusion.

The succeeding paragraph in the German is intentionally pointed to develop an initial suspense. A single sentence in the English fails to create the desired atmosphere. The Professor's catch-phrase, "Do you follow me?" punctuates the new text, lending it a valuable objectivity. It is missing in the English.

At the beginning of the German an important line emphasizes the presence of the subconscious. Only the nucleus of that line is to be found in the English.

In the English the body is told to take valerian. "There is none left? Go to the chemist's. Valerian—thirty drops in a glass of water." To go to the chemist's and to return would occupy a half-hour; yet the drug is taken at once, and its effect is immediate. In the German Evreinov avoids telescoping time by telling the body to take bromide. It is unable to find the tablets at first, but soon discovers them in its glasses-case. The walk to the chemist's is eliminated, and the action takes exactly as much time on the stage as it would in real life.

The anatomy of the original is incorrect. As the result of a shot between the fourth and fifth ribs "a great hole opens in the diaphragm"—which it would have missed by some inches. Evreinov had learned better when Csokor met him.

A detailed comparison of the texts would be illuminating. There is no room for it here. But the ending of the English text—"This is Everyone's Town. You have to get out here, sir. You change here." "Thank you, yes. I change here"—should be contrasted with the immensely more forcible termination of the Csokor-Mocrousov-Evreinov version. The speakers are the same; but a new and most wonderful conclusion had occurred to the author, and was used by the adaptor.

Csokor found it difficult to place the play. It was rejected



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by all of the German directors in spite of its success in Russia. Finally the actor Karl Etlinger became interested, and brought about its production at the Renaissance Theatre in Vienna.

Directed by Etlinger, who also played the part of "The Second Self," and with a setting by O. F. Werndorff, *The Corridors of the Soul* had the greatest success of any one-act play in Vienna in many years. ♣

*Russia*

THE CORRIDORS OF THE SOUL

A MONODRAMA

By NICHOLAS NICHOLAIEVITCH EVRÉINOV

*Adapted by PERCIVAL WILDE from the Vienna version  
of FRANZ THEODOR CSOKOR*

## CHARACTERS

THE PROFESSOR (*as Prologue*)

THE CLINICAL ASSISTANT

THE FIRST SELF (*Reason*)

THE SECOND SELF (*Emotion*)

THE THIRD SELF (*the Immortal Sub-  
conscious*)

THE WIFE (*in two semblances*)

THE INAMORATA (*in two semblances*)

A CONDUCTOR

*The nature of the scene is explained by the Prologue.*

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## THE CORRIDORS OF THE SOUL

*A clinical assistant in a white uniform enters at the right in front of the curtain, with a blackboard, coloured chalks, and a sponge.*

THE PROFESSOR [*entering at the left, taking his position next to the blackboard, and addressing the audience*]. Ladies and gentlemen: Last Friday the author of the play, *The Corridors of the Soul*, which is about to be performed for you, sought me out in connexion with his work. I confess that once the manuscript had been delivered to me I began its perusal with distrust, for I expected it to be just another theatrically illogical light comedy. I was all the more pleasantly surprised, therefore, when I discovered, as I can testify to you, that *The Corridors of the Soul* was a most scientific work, in complete harmony with the latest hypotheses of empirical psychoanalysis. The investigations of Freud, Wundt, Théodule Ribot, and others have led us to conclude that the human soul is not homogeneous, is not a unity, but is composed of a number of selves. Do you follow me? [*He writes.*]  $S_1 + S_2 + S_3 + S_4 \dots + S_n = S$ . Fichte, indeed, advanced the kindred view that even if one self was the self, the external world could be no self. Now the most recent scientific research discloses that precisely as the world is no self, so the self itself is not a single self. Do you follow me? The self, as I have already explained, is not a simple entity, because multiple selves are to be found in the one. As a matter of fact, existence is more than a plain "I am," for the complete self, our so-called soul, is, according to the latest opinion, a triple ego. [*He writes on the board:*]  $Ego = X: 3$ . If X represents the individual, then [*he writes*]  $X = 3$  Ego. Now the first self is the logical one, our reason; the

second self is the illogical one, our emotions. Both terminate with this life. The third, subconscious self, which is to be found on the other side of the threshold, is the undying part of our souls: psychic energy. The three smaller selves total up to the capital Self, and we write in simpler form the equation with which we began: [*he writes:*]  $S_1 + S_2 + S_3 = \mathbf{S}$ .

Where shall we say the individual parts of the collective self reside in us? What is the site of the so-called soul? The ancients placed it in the liver; Descartes placed it in the pineal gland; our author, however, believes that the soul is to be found at the spot to which we instinctively raise our hands whenever we utter strong expressions, such as "How terrible!" or "Oh, my soul!" or other phrases indicating horror. Do you follow me?

Perhaps I may sum up most clearly by presenting graphically the corridors of the soul. [*He draws on the board with coloured chalks.*] At the left, above the high-vaulted diaphragm, suspended by the aorta and the veins, hangs a great heart, which beats sixty to one hundred and twenty-five times a minute. The lobes of the lungs function on either side of it, breathing fourteen to sixteen times a minute. The spine rises vertically in the background, with the ribs radiating out from it. There is communication with the brain: I represent it by a telephonic apparatus sketched in yellow, the colour of the nerves. Slanting obliquely towards the diaphragm, like the strings of a harp, I draw the pale nerves themselves. That, approximately, ladies and gentlemen, is the stage setting in which we place the tripartite soul of the tall, bad-tempered individual with whom we are now about to deal, a certain Mr Ivanov, who is at the moment in a dance-hall, or in some other similar place wholly unsuitable for a respectable gentleman, and who is drinking most intemperately. Do you follow me?

Knowledge, ladies and gentlemen, does not merely explain: it consoles. Knowledge, for example, does not merely assert that the total self is unhappy because of the

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silly act of one of its components: it proceeds to discover which self is to blame. If it be the emotional self, then the matter is of little importance so long as the rational self still functions; in a similar manner the subconscious, slumbering within us, as it were, can do no harm so long as it remains on the other side of the threshold of consciousness. The situation becomes dangerous only when it is the fault of the rational self, either because of its illness or because its will is thwarted; and that, ladies and gentlemen, is very apt to occur in the strenuous times in which we live. But now I wish to terminate my introduction. You understand the situation, and I make way for it—way for the author, way for the actors, and, most of all, way for you, the appreciative audience gathered together to witness this remarkable play. Do you follow me?

*[He goes; the assistant takes up the blackboard and its appurtenances and follows him.]*

### THE CURTAIN RISES

*The scene shows the site of the soul, exactly as explained and diagrammed on the blackboard by the professor. On the floor of the stage [the red, somewhat convex diaphragm] are the three selves, all dressed in black, all somewhat similar, but each dressed in a different manner. The First Self, reason, wears a faultless walking coat and striped trousers; the Second, emotion, is in Bohemian costume, with a velvet jacket and a flowing purple bow tie; the Third, the immortal self, is garbed in travelling clothes, a cap on the head, with the peak half pulled down over the face. The First Self is somewhat grey at the temples, and the hair is carefully parted. The Second Self has a tousled head, and seems to be young and irresponsible. His lips are very red; his gestures are violent. The Third Self lies at the left, resting his head on a packed valise, and sleeps like an exhausted traveller during the action which follows.*

*The lungs and heart function in whatever manner may be worked out by the stage direction.*

THE SECOND SELF [*at the spine, talking into the telephone*]. What? . . . Hello! Don't you hear me? . . . Well, I'm talking loudly enough! . . . Oh, your ears are ringing? That's nothing but the trickery of your nerves: drown them out! Brandy! More brandy, that's what you need!

[*The heart begins to beat more rapidly.*

THE FIRST SELF [*disapprovingly*]. That's the third bottle! And all on account of you, as if you were the only person here! Look at that heart overworking! Don't you see how it's thumping?

THE SECOND SELF [*nervously*]. Of course I see; but, according to you, it should spend its whole life loafing—like that object there! [*He indicates the Third Self.*] A hell of an existence *he* leads!

THE FIRST SELF. Shh! Leave him alone! I merely call to your attention that if you continue to strain the heart in this manner it will quit completely.

THE SECOND SELF. What of it? That's going to happen anyhow, sooner or later.

THE FIRST SELF. Then you agree with my diagnosis?

THE SECOND SELF [*undisturbed*]. Why not? Sometimes you're right. [*He twangs at the nerves, which respond with jangling noises. He sings like a child, insolently.*] Sometimes! . . . Sometimes! . . .

THE FIRST SELF. Don't pluck at the nerves so violently! How often have I forbidden you to do that?

THE SECOND SELF [*taking offence*]. Forbidden? Forbidden? Whom do you think you're talking to? Do you take me for your lackey? Hah! I'm a poet! I am love! Flame! Revolution! If it weren't for me this place would be a sepulchre full of mould and spider-webs! Yes, a sepulchre!

THE FIRST SELF [*controlled*]. Stop talking nonsense.

THE SECOND SELF. I'm telling you the truth. [*He pauses.*] Now, that matter of his drinking: whose fault is it?

## THE CORRIDORS OF THE SOUL

THE FIRST SELF. Yours! You compel him to do it!

THE SECOND SELF. All right; but I make him do it because he'd hang himself if he had to listen to your long-winded dissertations all day long.

THE FIRST SELF. How ridiculous! It's quite the other way round: all his unhappiness and lack of success are your fault! Yes, yours! You, Mr Emotional Self, are nothing but a disorderly person, an abandoned wretch, beyond salvation! Has it ever struck you that there are such things as ethical standards, human duties, religion?

THE SECOND SELF. You're a walking tract. Don't annoy me.

THE FIRST SELF. You can't insult me, no matter what you say. My opinion of you is too low.

THE SECOND SELF. And mine of you is still lower. I'm an artist! [*He grasps the nerves and twangs them violently.*]

THE FIRST SELF. How absurd you are! And stop wrenching at my nerves!

THE SECOND SELF. *Your nerves? That's rich! Mr Rational Self, let me point out to you that these nerves belong to us both, and that if I wrench at your nerves I wrench at my own at the same time. I have exactly as much right to do it as you. If I treated our nerves in the manner you approve I'd be bored sick. Not for me, thank you! I want to raise hob with my nerves, and I'm going to do it! I enjoy it, because they're as taut as the strings of a harp! I can play a hymn on them, a hymn to freedom and to love! [He plays; the heart labours prodigiously. He stops and runs to the telephone.]* Brandy!

THE FIRST SELF [*following him quickly and taking the apparatus from him*]. Bromide, please.

THE SECOND SELF [*struggling with him*]. Brandy—what the devil!

THE FIRST SELF [*forcing him away from the telephone, and keeping him away*]. Take a bromide, my dear sir! Do you hear me?... What?... They're in your waistcoat-pocket. ... No? Look again. ... Ah! You found them



in your glasses-case? How lucky! . . . And now drink a glass of water. That's right. . . . At last! [*He hangs up, and returns to the centre more quietly. The dialogue which follows has a more subdued character on account of the bromide. The heart functions normally, and the Third Self seems to sleep more soundly. For a little while the First and Second Selves walk up and down silently, staring at the floor. Presently they come face to face.*] Are you quieter now?

THE SECOND SELF [*friendly*]. Hum. . . . And you?

THE FIRST SELF. You see for yourself.

[*They have approached the Third Self.*]

THE SECOND SELF [*shaking his head*]. What on earth is the matter with that chap, the subconscious?

THE FIRST SELF [*respectfully*]. He's always the same. He rests in sublime peace. [*As the Second Self bends towards him*] In heaven's name, don't touch him! If he wakes we shall be lost! Come here, instead, and listen. This concerns you as well as me. [*He goes to the telephone.*] The bromide had a good effect, didn't it? . . . Fine! Now I'm going to make another attempt to influence your conscience. My dear sir, I really don't understand why you should be so very much upset. I can see now the woman bewitched you with her talents—if we may call her peculiar qualities 'talents'—but that you should consider leaving your wife and children on her account—— [*To the Second Self, who attempts to take the apparatus, rather sharply*] Excuse me, please! [*Into the telephone*] My dear sir, there's simply no excuse for that kind of thing. It just isn't done. It's only when you lower yourself into the gutter that nice legs and a slim neck count for more than the temple of the soul.

THE SECOND SELF. My God, what trite and affected rubbish! "The temple of the soul"! The devil take your "temple"! I want flesh and blood, and that's why she appeals to me! She is desirable for her body: who would deny that?

THE FIRST SELF [*contemptuously*]. An animal wouldn't, no, but a rational human being would! [*Into the telephone*]

Smoke a cigar—a light cigar. It will soothe you. And in future do what I tell you. Right?

THE SECOND SELF. And I'm chained to that sort of thing to the end of my days!

THE FIRST SELF. There was a time when you didn't object.

THE SECOND SELF. Quite right! There was even a time when I had a good deal of respect for you—when you were amenable to reason, Mr Rational Self. Naturally I shan't forget how helpful you were when I fell head over heels in love with that little Hanni, how you overcame the girl's caution with your pious prating, how very skilfully you deceived her parents! Yes, indeed, you can be a sanctimonious blackguard when you want to! But at heart you're a Philistine, nevertheless! Ever since I married you've given me no help whatever. You've neglected the most tempting opportunities.

THE FIRST SELF. You compliment me—in spite of our conflicting views. But I don't take you seriously: your talk is that of a sick man.

THE SECOND SELF. Good heavens, what do you know about it, Rational Self? You don't understand what a noble creature she is! How perfectly adorable! How charming! How divine! How childish and devilish at the same time in her sweet coquetry! I'll grant you that she is nothing but a chorus girl, but what's it against her? What does it signify? You haven't seen her in her full beauty, or even you would have yielded to her charms. But no, no! Why should I resort to mere words, when I can show you the reality? I'll fetch her! [*He runs out at the left and returns with the Inamorata in the semblance in which his infatuation pictures her.*] Sing for me, divine creature! Sing as you did yesterday, the day before yesterday, as once, as always! Sing! *Chantez! Je vous prie!* [*To the rational self, which stares at the semblance with growing horror*] *A propos*, old chap, you ought to learn French. Don't you think so? I tell you that French is just as necessary as a bite of bread.

[*The Inamorata sings and dances in time with the happily beating heart.*

THE FIRST SELF [*turning his back*]. I'll have nothing to do with this.

THE SECOND SELF [*when she finishes, delighted*]. Charming! I'd give the world for your voice! What, for your voice? For your dainty feet! By God, there isn't a carpet in existence that's good enough for your twinkling toes! [*He throws himself to the floor before her.*] See! I adore you! I worship you! Dance on me! Oh, you divine creature, you angelic dream!

[*He kisses her feet, her hands, her mouth, her hair.*

THE FIRST SELF. What an illusion of the senses! Stop! You're not kissing what you think you are; you're kissing the externalization of your dreams! Don't you smell the rouge? Can't you see that the hair which your fingers are caressing, the hair which you think is hers, is nothing but a wig? She's forty if she's a day! Don't let her make a fool of you! Look at the actual facts! [*While he speaks the idealized semblance of the Inamorata disappears at the right, and he leads in a caricature of her from the left.*] There! Look! The twinkling toes are crippled! They've got ingrown nails and bunions, and she's wearing imitation calves! Look at her face! Off with the rouge and off with the wig! [*He rubs his hand over her face, getting it red in the process, and rips off the wig, under which are only a few strands of hair.*] Show me what you've got in your mouth! [*He draws out a set of false teeth.*] There! And now, sing! Sing and dance, my little darling! [*The Inamorata sings discordantly and dances clumsily.*

THE SECOND SELF [*screaming*]. Lies! Lies! She's nothing like that! You've bewitched her! [*To the semblance*] Out with you! [*He throws her out, and falls to his knees.*] I'm going insane!

THE FIRST SELF. What is the French proverb? "Jupiter, you are angry, therefore you are wrong."

THE SECOND SELF [*leaping up*]. Rot!

THE FIRST SELF. Not at all, Mr Emotional Self. You

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are aware that your noble, adored creature isn't fit to tie up the shoelaces of the woman from whom you're so anxious to free yourself. And why? I ask you, why? [*From the left he leads in a Madonna-like semblance of the Wife, with a child cradled in her arms.*] Because this woman has offered you only tenderness and affection, because she nursed your child at her warm breast, because she watches over its cradle. No, you can't compare her singing with the frivolous songs of the other one. [*The Wife begins to sing Mozart's "Cradle Song," "Sleep, my angel, sleep . . ."*] Just listen, Mr Emotional Self! Listen to the lullaby! Have you no appreciation of those limpid notes? I'll grant you she doesn't indulge in pyrotechnics, and that there's nothing theatrically effective in her delivery. Her voice is poor and thin; it's the third night that she's gone without sleep, singing, singing, while waiting for you!

THE WIFE [*who has finished the song, pauses; sighs*]. Yes, sleep, little angel. What? You've got a pain somewhere? It'll be gone soon, sweet. Just be brave and patient, darling. . . . Daddy? Where is Daddy? He'll be home soon. . . . He's coming straight away, dear! Straight away! Yes! And maybe he'll bring you a new toy to play with: a little horse, that goes trot, trot, trot. Oh, Daddy is always so kind.

THE SECOND SELF [*coarsely*]. Enough of that nonsense! There's not a word of truth in it! Away with you! [*He thrusts her out.*] She a devoted wife? She? It's a figment of your imagination! I know her better than that! She's killed my energy with her eternal stupidity! She's never given me a single moment of joy!

[*From the right he brings in the Wife as he sees her, an arrogant, provincial woman, with false, dangling ringlets, and a sloppy negligé, spotted with coffee-stains.*]

THE CARICATURE OF THE WIFE [*nagging*]. To be the wife of a minor Government official? That's a fine job! And to be the wife of a fool like you? God, my poor parents!

If they only knew they'd turn over in their graves! I could have married a big pot, and see what I got stuck with! [Turning] How on earth has he been able to hold on to his job this long? Why haven't they kicked him out, the drunkard? He soaks the little brain he's got in alcohol, the swine! That's what he is: nothing but a swine! Yes, he knows how to bring children into the world—and how to run after every dirty little tart—and he has the impudence to prate of his love for art, to say that he cares for the theatre! The slob! As if night clubs and houses of prostitution were theatres! If I were a man I'd stay a mile away from the painted carrion he finds there! How can I know he won't pass on some filthy disease to one of the children, the rotten cad? But how could he be anything else than that? He's not accountable for his actions. If I didn't keep my eyes open he'd take the children's blankets to the pawnbroker's! You bet he would! A man who hardly knows what even the outside of the church looks like! And who is as stupid as an imbecile into the bargain! But he *talks* philosophically! If he hasn't got 'freedom' and 'ordinary human rights' he can't even go to sleep! He talks about those things until he's hoarse—naturally in pubs, while lapping up liquor. Well, I'll knock those ideas of 'freedom' out of his hide for him!

THE SECOND SELF [*triumphantly*]. That's what she's like! You heroine! Why shouldn't I leave her, and go to the other woman? [*From the left he leads in the idealized semblance of the Inamorata.*] Why shouldn't I go to this woman, who is to her as the sun is to a tallow candle, who can bring sense and purpose into my life?

[*The Inamorata sings, and, introducing kicks into her dancing, kicks out the caricature of the Wife; suddenly she stops, as the idealized semblance of the Wife re-enters.*

THE WIFE [*to the Inamorata*]. Please go. You don't belong here.

THE FIRST SELF. Quite right.

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THE WIFE. You, don't really love him. You wouldn't make the slightest sacrifice for him. To you he is just one man among men; to me he is everything. If there's a spark of womanly decency left in you let him go! I need him and his help. Don't take him away from his family: it will suffer without him.

THE INAMORATA [*laughing merrily*]. Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! [*With an outlandish accent, and sneering speech*] What pathos! What cheap theatricalism!

THE WIFE. I ask you again, please go. Don't force me to extreme measures.

THE INAMORATA. So you dare to threaten me? Well, that's good! What am I going to do about it if my feet are so dainty, my breasts so firm, my voice so effortless that it floats out of my throat like that of a lark, my wit so natural that it sparkles like champagne?

THE SECOND SELF [*applauding*]. Bravo! Bravo!

THE WIFE. All you want is his money, you cheap bought woman!

THE INAMORATA. What? I'm cheap, and I'm bought? Take it back! , [*She throws herself upon her.*

THE WIFE. Get out!

[*They seize each other and struggle, while the heart beats rapidly, as if in a deathly palpitation. They fight their way into the background, in which they vanish, while a great shudder convulses the entire organism—and in the movement brings back the battling women, each now in her caricatured semblance. The Wife brandishes the teeth and the wig of the chorus girl, who, in turn, triumphantly exhibits the false curls and braid of her enemy. The women are screaming atrocious words at each other.*

THE WIFE. You dirty slut!

THE INAMORATA. Washerwoman! Stupid cow!

[*They disappear again into the background and return in their idealized semblances. The Inamorata forces the wife to the ground, and sets her foot on her neck.*

*Then she turns laughingly with a graceful dance step and a "Voilà!" to the side at which the emotional self applauds loudly, while the wife, weeping, steals away at the left.*

*The First Self, who has controlled himself with difficulty during this scene, now flings himself upon the Inamorata and strikes her across the face. The Inamorata screams and flees, wailing, to the rear, where she hides. The Second Self leaps at the First Self with a tigerish spring and strangles him. The heart throbs frantically, missing beats. Two or three nerves snap. The Inamorata returns slowly.*

THE SECOND SELF [*makes sure that his foe is dead; then throws himself at the feet of the Inamorata*]. Now everything is going to be as you want it! Dearest! Darling! Sweet-heart!

THE INAMORATA [*primping with the aid of a compact*]. That's enough, dearie. I'm fed up. I'm through. Love sings in notes—banknotes. You don't seem to have many of them, do you, dearie? What? No, a fellow like you wouldn't have coin. Of course not. . . . Don't look at me like that: there's nothing to be done about it. It was good fun while it lasted, but it's over now. See? Don't be so tragic about it! So long!

[*She pats his cheek and trips off at the right.*

THE SECOND SELF [*stands as if petrified. A long, clear trill—the voice of the Inamorata—becomes louder and louder at the right; at the left, from the darkness, gradually appears the idealized semblance of the Wife, seeming to quiet the child in her arms. She lifts her head, and gazes at him with great, dark eyes full of silent reproach. The motif of the "Cradle Song" begins, and disappears slowly with the vision. The Second Self breaks out suddenly in absolute despair. He runs to the telephone. He snatches the receiver to his ear. Forcefully*]. Just one request! Quick! End it! I can't stand any more! I'm through! . . . The pistol is in your hip pocket! Yes! Point it at yourself—quickly!

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Please! Quickly! I feel so awful! [*Urgently*] Aim carefully—between the third and fourth ribs! . . . Yes! . . . Well? Well? What are you afraid of? It'll take only a fraction of a second! . . . Be merciful! [*Screaming*] Now!

*[There is a second's pause. The Third Self is awake, and is glancing about uneasily, the prey of a vague suspicion. Then there is the crash of a shot, deafening as the report of a cannon. Its thunder is echoed in the vault of the organs. A huge circular hole suddenly appears in the heart, and red streams of blood—broad serpentine ribbons—pour down upon the Second Self, who collapses, suffocating, dying, under the torrent. The stage darkens. The heart has stopped beating. The lungs cease to breathe.]*

*[There is a long pause, during which the Third Self stretches, yawns, and rubs his eyes.]*

A CONDUCTOR [*entering quickly with a lighted lantern*]. You, sir! Get up, sir! You've got to change here. Yes, change! You're going into another Mr Ivanov.

THE THIRD SELF [*rising*]. Another Mr Ivanov? . . . Again? . . . Well, let's try the new Ivanov. So far as I'm concerned they're all alike.

*[He settles his travelling cap firmly, takes up his valise, and yawningly follows the conductor off.]*